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Training Everyday Missionaries and Disciple-Making Disciples with Irvine Presbyterian Church

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Written by

GABRIEL C. FUNG

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TRAINING EVERYDAY MISSIONARIES AND DISCIPLE-MAKING DISCIPLES WITH IRVINE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

GABRIEL C. FUNG
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ABSTRACT

Training Everyday Missionaries and Disciple-making Disciples with Irvine Presbyterian Church

Gabriel C. Fung
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2016

The purpose of this doctoral project was to implement a pilot missional community as one way of helping Irvine Presbyterian Church live out their mission, "to make disciples who make disciples." It proposed helping congregants shift their understanding from church as a place to church as a people by training and equipping them to be everyday missionaries and disciple-making disciples within the vehicle of a missional community, which can be described as an extended family following Jesus on mission together. To test this thesis, a pilot missional community was launched in March 2014 and is currently ongoing with around thirty participants.

Through an exploration of Scripture, this project identified God as the original missional community. Accordingly, God's people are called to join him on his mission in the world: Jesus' disciples are missionary disciples and the Church is the Spirit-led and empowered sent people of God. This project further argued that discipleship and mission are to be practiced in community. It examined the New Testament *oikos*/household churches as a biblical basis for missional communities, and considered some sociological insights and missiological applications in proposing the adaptation and implementation of a pilot missional community within the Irvine church.

Testing of this thesis is ongoing and an initial assessment is planned for mid-2016. However, the full results of this project will not be evident for several years given the investment of time and relational energy needed to practice discipleship and mission in community, particularly in light of the challenges posed by the individualism and busyness so common to life in suburban Southern California. Nevertheless, initial progress has been encouraging, and this project commends to the Irvine church as well as the larger Church in their respective contexts the further adaptation and implementation of missional communities in their efforts to make disciples.

Content Reader: Gareth Icenogle, DMin

Words: 299

To my parents,
Ronald and Amy Fung

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Scott Bullock has been a brother and friend in our shared ministry with Irvine Presbyterian Church (IPC) and continues to be an encourager and advocate of the ideas and practices presented in this project. Don Barkley, Dorothy Bregozzo, and Aaron Schweizer were instrumental in leading some of IPC's organizational and cultural change which subsequently allowed for this project to be applied and implemented. Bud Thoreen was invaluable in recounting IPC's history, and Linda Maestas was a great help with the congregational research. To all of you and the other IPC elders, congregants, and staff, thank you for your ongoing commitment to make disciples who make disciples.

The members of our pilot missional community—Burk and Cindy Beadle, Joe and Jenessa Eelkema, Sam Niu and Ying Li, Paul and Diane Park, Chris and Lindsay Pettit, Doug and Barbara Robison, Carlo and Rachel Van Niekerk, Steve and Vikki Vosbigian, and all the children—have been active learners and participants. Thank you for the privilege of following Jesus on mission and sharing life together.

My parents, Ronald and Amy Fung, have been an unwavering source of support, as have my brothers, Clem and Justin. Thank you for your prayers and encouragement.

Saving the best for last, my wife, Maribeth, has cheered me on at every step and often gave of herself sacrificially so I could have the time and space to read, study, think, and write. And while our children, Matthew and Amy, are still a bit too young to understand what their dad has been working on, in their unique ways they have injected joy and laughter into what has sometimes been a slow and challenging writing process. Thank you for all your love, sacrifice, patience, and prayers. I am so grateful we get to love God and follow Jesus as a family. God has blessed me richly with each of you.

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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

If you make disciples, you always get the church.
But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.
—Mike Breen and Steve Cockram[1]

I remember reading these words in the opening pages of Breen and Cockram's book, *Building a Discipling Culture*. It was March 2012. Just two months earlier, my wife, Maribeth, our two young children, and I had said goodbye to our church. The congregation had encouraged and nurtured me in pastoral ministry over the course of my twelve-and-a-half years with them, and my family and I had built significant friendships and relationships with people in the church. But God was moving us on: Maribeth and I sensed him leading us into something new—we did not know exactly what, only that it was time to go. So with tears, joy, and gratitude, we celebrated with the congregation and said a bittersweet goodbye.

At the time, I was a year into the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary and I dove headlong into my studies. I had thought initially I would focus on something related to preaching and leadership but soon sensed God leading me to focus instead on discipleship and disciple-making. A key part of clarifying my focus was this statement by Breen and Cockram.

When I first read it, instinctively I knew they were right. And yet at the same time I felt a deep uneasiness within. I knew the Great Commission. I knew Jesus' mandate for his disciples to go and make other disciples. My former church had as their stated

[1] Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did*, 2nd ed. (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2011), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 100-101.

mission: "To help every person become a fully committed follower of Jesus Christ."[2] I had spent more than a decade trying to live into that with them. But I also knew the challenge of staying focused on the disciple-making task. I knew how often and easily it gets obscured in the everyday busyness of people's lives, in the various activities and programs of a church, in the way congregants and leaders often evaluate ministry opportunities and effectiveness, in the responsibilities and expectations that come with being a pastor. And as I reflected on my own life and the season of ministry I had just completed—amidst all the preaching, teaching, worship leading, pastoral visits, staff and leadership meetings—I asked and wondered to myself, "Did I actually make disciples? Had I helped them know Jesus more intimately, trust Jesus more fully, follow Jesus more faithfully? And could they now help others do the same? How fruitful and effective had I really been in making disciples?"

Since that day, Breen and Cockram's words have become an anchor of sorts for me in terms of what God has called me to be and do in pastoral ministry: amidst all the work and responsibilities that come with helping to lead a church, my calling is to make disciples. In fact, the primary task and mission of the Church should be discipleship and disciple-making. In the Gospels, the word "church" occurs only twice. One instance is in the context of discipline within the Christian community (Mt 18:17). The other is when Jesus declares, "I will build my church"[3] (Mt 16:18). It is his Church. Building the Church is his job. The job he gives disciples, meanwhile, is to "go and make disciples" (Mt 28:19). Indeed, even a brief survey of the New Testament will show that discipleship

[2] Journey Evangelical Church, "What We Believe," journeyec.org, http://journeyec.org/believe.php (accessed June 24, 2015).

[3] All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

and disciple-making are practically on every page: being a disciple is the defining call for every Christian, and making disciples the defining mission for every church.

Numerous voices past and present have championed this. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Christianity without the living Jesus Christ remains necessarily a Christianity without discipleship; and a Christianity without discipleship is always a Christianity without Jesus Christ."[4] C. S. Lewis said that the overarching purpose of the Church is to draw people to Christ and to make them like Christ: "If the Church is not doing this, then all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible, are a waste of time."[5] And more recently, Alan Hirsch sums it up this way: "When dealing with discipleship, and the related capacity to generate authentic followers of Jesus, we are dealing with that single most crucial factor that will in the end determine the quality of the whole—if we fail at this point then we must fail in all the others."[6]

Today I serve as leader of disciple-making and equipping with Irvine Presbyterian Church (IPC) in Southern California. It is a context where happily and providentially my personal calling and conviction about the priority of discipleship and disciple-making both inform and converge with the bulk of my work and ministry responsibilities. IPC's mission is "to make disciples who make disciples,"[7] and my role, broadly defined, is to help them do this and live it out.

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[4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 59.

[5] C. S. Lewis, quoted in Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 102.

[6] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 102.

[7] Irvine Presbyterian Church, "Our Mission," irvinepres.org, http://irvinepres.org/our-mission/ (accessed June 24, 2015).

One of the key things I am working on is helping congregants shift their understanding of what it means for them to be the church. I had a conversation with a friendly couple over coffee outside the sanctuary one Sunday. "That was a wonderful worship service!" she said. "The music was fantastic," the husband agreed. He then added enthusiastically, "I think it would be really great if our musicians put on a big concert, we get the word out and get as many people to come to our church as possible!"[8]

I had another conversation, this time with a young professional over a mid-week lunch at a restaurant near his office. He had emailed two days earlier asking if we could meet. After we placed our orders, he explained, "Gabe, I have this friend who's searching spiritually. He knows I'm a Christian. He asked about my 'spirituality.' I was scrambling at first to know what to say and how to help him. That's why I wanted to get together with you. What do I do? What do I say to him?"[9]

In many ways, these two conversations capture the essence of two very different understandings of what it means to be the church and how they relate to IPC. The first views church primarily as a place or a building, and the aim is to draw people onto the church campus to participate in a program or event. The second views church as a people following Jesus in the world, and the goal is to equip disciples to be everyday missionaries where they live, work, and play.

For much of their history, IPC has practiced more of the first—a predominantly attractional model of ministry—with large amounts of resources being poured into developing and maintaining the campus over the years. While the campus has been and

[8] Names omitted to maintain confidentiality, personal conversation, Irvine, CA, March 1, 2015.

[9] Name omitted to maintain confidentiality, personal conversation, Irvine, CA, September 2, 2014.

continues to be a helpful ministry tool, many congregants tend to identify church as the place, buildings, and programs. However, given the disciple-making mission to which IPC has been called, congregants must learn to practice and live out more of the second—a more missional mentality and posture—and recapture their identity as the sent people of God following Jesus on mission in the world.

Making this shift from church as a place to church as a people and addressing this challenge is the focus of this doctoral project and its thesis: to equip the people of IPC to be everyday missionaries and disciple-making disciples through the vehicle of missional communities[10] in which they learn and train together using several biblically-based discipling practices and tools. The purpose of this project is to launch a pilot missional community that is intended to serve as a model for the larger congregation and eventually multiply into two missional communities. It is further envisioned that IPC might one day live out their mission not just gathered on a campus but also scattered as a network of missional communities across Irvine and surrounding cities.

This paper has three main parts. Part One will describe IPC's context. There will be a brief history of the church and a look at the people who currently make up the congregation—one that is slowly becoming more ethnically diverse and reflective of those in Irvine. An examination of the ministry and congregational culture will give attention both to IPC's strengths, as well as challenges that stand in the way of IPC living out their mission, particularly the predominantly attractional mentality.

[10] A missional community is a mid-sized group, around twenty to fifty people, and can be described as an extended family following Jesus on mission together. Missional communities will be examined in more detail in Chapter 3.

Part Two will explore the biblical and theological foundations for developing a more missional mentality and posture. It will look at how the Church is called by God and empowered by the Spirit to be a missionary people, and how discipleship and mission are inextricably linked. The discussion will consider the biblical basis, sociological and missiological support, and practical implementation of missional communities as a vehicle for training missionary disciples, while also taking into account some denominational factors related to IPC.

Part Three will outline steps for launching a pilot missional community and explain how participants will be trained and equipped to be everyday missionaries and disciple-making disciples. It will identify the goals, content, leadership, target population, needed resources, and timeline for the pilot missional community. The section will conclude with a plan for assessment and evaluation and project some possible next steps.

Finally, a brief grammatical explanation should be noted. The pronoun "it" is often used when referring to the church as an organization or institution. But in the New Testament, the church is first of all the people of God. As Reggie McNeal points out, "Followers of Jesus don't belong to a church. They are the church. . . . Church is not something outside of themselves that they go to or join or support; it's something they are. The missional church is not a what but a who."[11] Therefore, given the focus of this doctoral project, and in order to emphasize the primary biblical definition of church as a people, this paper deliberately uses "they/them/their" to refer to the church and in particular to IPC.

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[11] Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 502-504.

CHAPTER 1

MINISTRY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF IRVINE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IPC is a Reformed, evangelical congregation that today gathers for weekly worship in the affluent, suburban city of Irvine. The church started in 1975 and the city was incorporated just four years earlier in 1971,[1] and in many ways the two have grown and changed alongside each other over the years. This chapter provides an overall description of IPC—their history, people, culture, and context.

A Brief History of Irvine Presbyterian Church (1975-2010)

An early history of IPC begins, "Long before there was a development known as Woodbridge, the only sights to be seen across the pastoral plains were grazing cattle and heavily laden orange trees. It was back then that a group of ministers and elders from nearby Presbyterian churches . . . began to consider the formation of a new church in the young city of Irvine."[2] Those considerations eventually led to the formation of a nine-member search committee that was charged with finding a new pastor to lead this new

[1] City of Irvine, "About Irvine," cityofirvine.org, http://www.cityofirvine.org/about-irvine (accessed July 1, 2015).

[2] Irvine Presbyterian Church, *Built on a Foundation of Prayer 1975-1985: A Look Back and a Vision for the Future* (Irvine, CA: Internal Church Publication, 1985), 5.

congregation—one that as of yet had no people and no buildings. After months praying and talking together, combing through more than 250 resumes, listening to sermons and interviewing candidates, the committee felt God's leading to call Ben Patterson from La Jolla Presbyterian Church. After initially saying he was not interested (and never having submitted a resume), Patterson eventually accepted God's call and became the church's founding pastor, accompanied by his wife, Lauretta. On Christmas Eve 1975, fifty people gathered for a first worship service at Los Naranjos Elementary School; it marked the official start of Irvine Presbyterian Church.[3]

The congregation in its early years was almost entirely White, people mostly in their twenties and thirties, young couples and families. Many were young professionals. Some were students from nearby University of California-Irvine. Bud Thoreen, one of IPC's original elders and still actively involved today, recalls the church at the time being "a young, energetic, dynamic new worship community."[4] Indeed, corporate worship was the focus and priority with a choir formed almost immediately that led the congregation in worship, along with Patterson's dynamic preaching that spoke to both head and heart. Attendance doubled in the first two months of IPC's existence and the congregation soon numbered about 150 people, with between twenty to thirty children being taught each week in Sunday School.[5]

By 1981, the congregation had outgrown Los Naranjos and began meeting at Woodbridge High School which was across the street from the parcel of land IPC had

[3] Irvine Presbyterian Church, *25 Years: Grace Upon Grace* (Irvine, CA: Internal Church Publication, 2001), 1.

[4] Bud Thoreen, Personal interview, Irvine, CA, April 21, 2015.

[5] Irvine Presbyterian Church, *25 Years*, 4.

purchased with help from the denomination. Construction on a new multi-purpose building began in June 1982 and completed in December of that year, giving congregants a more permanent place to call home.[6] The congregation continued to grow and a second Sunday morning service was added to accommodate all the people who were coming. In 1985, phase two of the campus development plan was completed as a new fourteen-room Christian education building was constructed to house the children's ministry as well as a daycare center.

In 1989, after fourteen years as IPC's founding pastor, Patterson left to take up a new call with another congregation. Jane Holslag (1982-1990), Chris Strutt (1983-1986), Jennifer Marona (1987-1988), and Larry Ballenger (1987-1993) served as associate pastors during the Patterson years. Following Patterson's departure, Ballenger led the church until the arrival of interim pastor Jim Hewett (1990-1991).

In 1991, Mark Roberts from First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood was called to be IPC's new senior pastor. His first five years with the church saw the rebirth of the men's ministry, the development of a new Saturday night worship service, the formation of a hand bell choir, and the beginning of life groups. Plans for a new sanctuary had already begun before Patterson left, but in the end those plans were set aside as Roberts led the church through a new process of envisioning a sanctuary specifically designed to enhance the worship experience. Construction took around fifteen months, and in September 1996, the first worship service in the new sanctuary was held.[7]

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[6] Ibid., 10.

[7] Ibid., 16-17.

The campus was a busy place with multiple worship services, Christian education classes, Bible studies, youth groups, all of the various committee meetings, as well as the programs and activities of the daycare center throughout the week. In addition, a Friday pizza lunch served on the church campus began (and continues today—some twenty years later) as a way of trying to reach the neighboring Woodbridge High School students; as one mother explained, "They probably don't realize that we are serving up prayers with their pizza, prayers that God will work in their lives."[8] Later, in 2005, an administration building housing the church offices and additional meeting space was added to the campus.

While corporate worship continued to be the dominant focus for the congregation, active involvement in missions, primarily lay-driven and led, began to deepen during this time. Whereas previously the church's missions involvement had mainly been to support mission partners financially, congregants began to invest themselves personally as part of short-term teams sent out by the church: some went to Mexico, some to Ukraine, others to Cambodia and South Africa.

It was during the Roberts years that IPC peaked numerically: worship attendance at the three weekend services averaged almost 650, and church membership stood at 777. Four more associate pastors—Thomas Gastil (1992-1998), Sharon Horne (1994-1996), Tim Avazian (1997-2012), and Kirk Winslow (2000-2013)—were brought on at various times to help lead the growing church. There were still relatively few retirees; many congregants were busy trying to raise their families and build their careers.

[8] Ibid., 18.

In 2007, Roberts left to take up a new call having served sixteen years as senior pastor. Interim pastor Rick Hull (2007-2010) then led the church in what turned out to be a long interim season lasting almost three years. A pastor nominating committee was formed in 2009, and after a deliberate and exhaustive year-long process, the church in 2010 called Scott Bullock to be IPC's next lead pastor.

Demographics[9]

IPC today remains predominantly White in its ethnic makeup but recent years have seen more people of other ethnicities becoming part of the church. There is a sizeable minority of generally second- and third-generation, English-speaking Asian-Americans from Korean, Chinese, Indian, Filipino, and Japanese backgrounds. Other ethnicities represented in smaller numbers include African-Americans, Latinos, Iranians, and Africans. There are also several mixed-race marriages (African-American/White, White/Asian-American, White/Latino). The multi-ethnic makeup of IPC is clearly visible: people of all ethnicities regularly help to lead in worship services; they serve together as members of the worship bands, handbell, children's, and adult choirs; a current youth intern is a Filipino-American; and in terms of church leadership, two of the twelve current elders are Asian-Americans, with a third Asian-American elder stepping down in the past year due to his work relocation. All in all, the ethnic makeup of the congregation is reflective of some of the greater ethnic diversity found in Irvine where

[9] While church records and ministry databases form the basis for some of this section, they do not present a completely accurate picture. Church records are often based on official membership and do not take into consideration the many who are not members but are actively engaged in the life and mission of the church. Ministry databases usually keep a record of everyone who participates in a ministry or program even just once, so can exaggerate actual numbers in terms of regular participation. In light of this, at times I will give concrete statistics about the congregation where I reasonably can, while at other times I will give broader, more general but still accurate descriptions.

there is no single majority ethnic group: Whites make up almost 46 percent of the city's population; Asians 38 percent; Hispanics a little less than 10 percent; African-Americans less than 2 percent; and Other 4.5 percent.[10]

IPC is also an aging congregation. Sixty-five percent of church members are age forty-five and older; 40 percent of church members are age fifty-six and older.[11] A mission study undertaken by the church in 2008 noted that the average age of the population in Irvine was thirty-seven;[12] even accounting for that number to rise by one or two years in the time since then, IPC as a congregation is significantly older than those in the surrounding community. Although the church has relatively few people in their twenties and thirties, there are quite a number of families with children: about sixty children are in Kids' Church each Sunday, from preschool through sixth grade, and around eighty-five junior high and high school students participate in one or more of the weekly student ministry activities. Newer people and families who visit and some who stay and participate in the life of the church also tend to be younger.

Geographically, most of IPC's people live in Irvine and the surrounding cities of Tustin, Lake Forest, Laguna Woods, Mission Viejo, Costa Mesa, and Newport Beach.[13] Irvine itself boasts excellent schools, numerous parks and trails, acres of green open spaces, a diverse collection of restaurants, shops, and entertainment, and an overall sense

[10] City of Irvine, "Demographics," cityofirvine.org, http://www.cityofirvine.org/about-irvine/demographics (accessed June 30, 2015).

[11] Irvine Presbyterian Church, "Church Report 2014" (Irvine, CA: Internal Church Record, 2014).

[12] Irvine Presbyterian Church, *Mission Study* (Irvine, CA: Internal Church Publication, 2008), 4.

[13] Ibid., 3.

of public safety. As such, it is highly desirable and consistently ranks as one of the best places in the US to live.[14]

Socio-economically, the congregation would be considered upper middle-class/wealthy. They are highly educated and affluent, very much in keeping with the demographics of Irvine where 97 percent of the population are high school graduates, 65 percent are college graduates, and the median household income is just under $93,000 per year.[15] Many in the church have advanced degrees and are accomplished professionals in their respective fields—including doctors, nurses, teachers, professors, administrators, accountants, attorneys, engineers, programmers, realtors, and contractors, to name a few. Many families in the church are dual-income households with both parents working in order to meet the high cost of living in Irvine and Orange County.[16]

Ministry and Congregational Culture

Knowing a people's history often helps explain how they came to be who they are, and this is certainly true for IPC. When it comes to their ministry and congregational culture, four major characteristics stand out. Each one has deep roots that trace back to some of the church's earliest days.

First, IPC places a priority on corporate worship and a high value on music and the arts. "Worship was the key thing for IPC for thirty years," Thoreen explains.

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[14] Deepah Bharath, "Irvine Named Among 15 Best Places to Live," *Orange County Register*, September 24, 2014, http://www.ocregister.com/articles/irvine-635944-city-top.html (accessed November 17, 2014).

[15] City of Irvine, "Demographics."

[16] Irvine Presbyterian Church, *Mission Study*, 4. "Orange County's reputation as a symbol of affluence and wealth is no myth: there are over 113,000 millionaire households here."

"Worship was preeminent. On the side we did missions. On the side we did shepherding. Those were all lay-led. The focus was corporate worship."[17] Founding pastor Patterson set this priority early on, often teaching the congregation to offer their worship both individually and collectively as a gift to God.[18] Accordingly, the church has had a long history of talented people contributing their musical and artistic gifts to help lead the congregation in worship each week—from volunteers in the early days to worship staff and professional musicians today. Stylistically, worship services and experiences over the years have included everything from the more high church/classic-traditional (choir-led, hymns and anthems, lots of liturgy) to the more edgy and contemporary (band-led, praise songs, a simpler overall order of worship); from quiet, meditative Evensongs to exuberant celebrations complete with brass quintets and full orchestras; from intimate Communion services to the informal, come-as-you-are sunrise service on Easter morning.

Currently, IPC has one blended Sunday worship service which is regularly led by both the choir and worship band. A hand bell and two children's choirs also contribute on a regular basis, and various guest musicians and performing groups are invited to participate on occasion. In addition to the many volunteers who lead and serve, six part-time staff members (with administrative support from a seventh full-time staff member) oversee, plan, and coordinate the various musical and logistical details that go into the weekly service. Average worship attendance is around 350 people.

Second, IPC holds to a Reformed and Evangelical theology. In his book, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, Roger Olson defines what it means to be "evangelical"

[17] Thoreen interview.

[18] Irvine Presbyterian Church, *25 Years*, 4.

based on four basic commitments commonly-held by those in the movement: the authority of Scripture for the Christian life; the necessity of conversion and becoming a Christian or follower of Jesus (whether or not dramatic or even remembered); the crucial, atoning work of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection to save and reconcile humanity back to God; and the imperative to share this Good News with others. To these, Olson adds deference to traditional Christian orthodoxy. He then offers a summary that can aptly be applied to describe IPC:

> Authentic evangelicalism is defined by its centrifugal center of powerful gravity and not by outlying boundaries that serve as walls or fences. The center is Jesus Christ and the gospel, but it also includes the four or five common core commitments: biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism, activism in missions and social transformation, and deferential respect for historic Christian orthodoxy.[19]

This is not to say, of course, that throughout IPC's history, everyone in the church held these beliefs. Even among church leadership, over the years, there have been different levels of commitment to these beliefs, different interpretations of what they mean, and different applications for how to live them out. It is the case, however, that the general ethos and theological standing of the church has been, and continues to be, very much Reformed and evangelical in that these are the ways the majority of the congregation and leadership have consistently understood, proclaimed, and practiced their Christian faith.

Third, and directly related to their evangelical emphasis, IPC practices a deep commitment to the Bible as the authoritative word of God. As with corporate worship, this was established early on as many of those who helped start the church came from St.

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[19] Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 42-43, 59-60.

Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach and Trinity United Presbyterian Church in Santa Ana, and brought with them a rich, evangelical heritage. Patterson was a gifted and dynamic preacher whose sermons moved and inspired the congregation each week.[20] Roberts, with a ministry background in Christian education, further taught the church to grow spiritually, intellectually, and in their overall understanding of Scripture.[21] But beyond the two former long-serving senior pastors, IPC over the years has had many gifted teachers—both men and women, both volunteers and staff—helping to deepen the congregation's biblical knowledge and love for God's word.

Today, multiple groups across the church gather each week on campus and in homes to study the Bible. There are Christian education classes for children, youth, and adults both on Sunday mornings and mid-week. A relatively small but committed group memorizes portions of Scripture and occasionally presents them in the worship service. And while the legacy of strong preaching established by Patterson and Roberts left an expectation in some that the senior pastor must be a polished public speaker and Bible communicator, recent years have seen a more team-based approach in which a handful of gifted lay preachers and teachers—many of them with some level of seminary training[22]—occasionally share the preaching ministry with the pastors.

Finally, IPC is a very missions-minded congregation with a long history of faithfully supporting missions both locally and globally. Jon Dietz, an elder and former

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[20] Irvine Presbyterian Church, *25 Years*, 4.

[21] Thoreen interview.

[22] Some have earned formal theological degrees. Others have taken seminary classes for personal enrichment. One is currently pursuing her Master of Divinity degree at Fuller.

(and, now again, current) missions team chair, shares an often-repeated story that illustrates this well:

> Early on, the Session made the commitment to give 5% of the church budget back to the Lord to be used in spreading the gospel both locally and abroad. Idealistically, the Session also added the guideline that this giving should increase 1% every year until we reached 50%. Early Sessions kept this up until the recession of the late '80s hit. We were up to 22% of the budget going to Missions, but we were cutting staff because of financial shortfalls.
> As Missions co-chair with my wife, Jennifer, I remember telling the Session that even though our missionaries depended on us for financial support, it would do them no good if we went under as a church while struggling to keep that commitment. We backed down, and our Missions budget has remained at or above 10% of our total budget ever since. I'll never forget how difficult it was for me to tell our missionaries that their support was being cut—or their almost universal response that I shouldn't worry because "God will provide." And, of course, he did.[23]

Some of IPC's most gifted and capable leaders serve in this area of missions, and the church continues to be very active. They support and partner with various missionaries and ministries in Africa, Asia, and Mexico. In 2014, they sent seventy-three people on a short-term trip to work with their mission partners in South Africa and Swaziland. In 2015, another forty-eight people participated on a mission trip and tour to Israel. Since the early-2000s, multiple groups each year have gone to serve orphanages and build houses in Mexico. Congregants also give to child sponsorship and scholarship programs that benefit roughly four hundred students in Mexico and Africa. An Alternative Christmas Bazaar is held each fall with proceeds going towards meeting the ministry needs of IPC's many mission partners. Closer to home, many congregants demonstrate God's love to others by serving in a number of local ministry opportunities such as housing the homeless, feeding the hungry, giving food vouchers to the needy,

[23] Irvine Presbyterian Church, *25 Years*, 9.

mentoring students, loving foster kids, working in soup kitchens, and packing Easter baskets and Christmas shoeboxes.

A New Pastor, A New (Old) Mission

Bullock arrived in June 2010 as IPC's new lead pastor. His prior ministry and educational experience included serving as youth director with First Presbyterian Church of Glen Ellyn for six years, followed by pastoral training at Fuller Theological Seminary; he then served as associate pastor with First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown for five years, towards the end of which he undertook further studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. He came with a global-mindedness cultivated by opportunities to travel and live abroad during his formative years, and a kingdom-mindedness shaped by his involvement in various local and cross-cultural missions, particularly during his university years at Wheaton College.

At the time of Bullock's arrival, IPC was in an extended season of decline. Thoreen recalls that they had already begun to be somewhat rudderless during the final three years of Roberts' pastorate; the additional three interim years essentially meant a six-year period in which the church lacked a clear sense of direction.[24] The interim years also saw a slow but sizeable drop in attendance as people left for other churches, and many things around IPC were put on hold until the new pastor's arrival. A self-described team-builder, equipper, and encourager, and highly relational in his approach,[25] Bullock

[24] Thoreen interview.

[25] Scott Bullock, Personal interview, Irvine, CA, July 15, 2015.

set to work by meeting with staff, elders, and congregants in an effort to get to know the church, their hopes and dreams as well as their fears and failures.

Foundational to Bullock's philosophy of ministry were his convictions that the church consists of its people unleashed to do ministry, that the role of pastors and church leaders is to equip the people (as outlined in Eph 4:11-16), and that the church is sent to follow Jesus on his mission in the world. In many ways, these convictions were at odds with the congregation's general expectations of a pastor-centric church with a predominantly attractional model of ministry. Bullock nevertheless worked to create a healthier organizational environment, one that promoted better communication between the various ministries as well as between leadership, congregation, and staff; he implemented more of a team-based approach to preaching and pastoral care, two areas of ministry traditionally viewed as done primarily (and even solely) by the pastor; and, as an evangelist at heart, he tried to instill a more missional mindset by encouraging and challenging congregants to go and build relationships with people outside the church rather than waiting for them to come onto the campus.

Bringing about these changes was a slow and often painful process. It was a trying first couple of years for the new pastor. Bullock admits, "I took some huge hits because I wasn't the pastor people expected me to be. It meant a lot of criticism, a lot of challenges, some confrontations, some lonely and sleepless nights, and some second-guessing and questioning."[26] Some people left IPC but God also brought alongside allies and advocates, many of them key leaders in the church who understood Bullock's ministry philosophy and helped to champion the changes.

[26] Bullock interview.

Around the same time, the church struggled with some major financial challenges. At one point in 2011, they faced a deficit of $450,000—the result of decreased giving due to the drop in church attendance and participation, coupled with a still struggling economy trying to come out of the Great Recession of the late-2000s. The hard realization that the church was overstaffed and underfunded prompted the elders in 2012 to make painful budget cuts and reduce staff. While it was difficult to say goodbye to a number of longtime staff members, it also provided the opportunity for leadership to re-examine God's call on IPC and to clarify their mission, vision, and overall direction.

Pivotal in these conversations was a longtime member and elder, Don Barkley, who observed that as a church, "We have been pretty good at making disciples but not very good at making disciples who make disciples."[27] Bullock subsequently guided the church through a visioning process that led them to refocus on Jesus' Great Commission and take up as their new stated mission, "to make disciples who make disciples." In early 2013, church leaders outlined a new strategic plan, including the reconfiguration of leadership and staff, all aimed at helping IPC live out their disciple-making mission. Still, some congregants left, perhaps unable or unwilling to adapt to the church's new direction and the many changes that had taken place. Things were not all negative, however, as IPC in September 2013 blessed and sent out a group of around seventy people to plant a new church—the realization of a process that had also begun a couple of years earlier.

[27] Bullock interview.

A New Catalyst

Part of the staff restructuring envisioned a new leader whose role it would be to help the congregation live out their mission, and in October 2013, I was called to serve as leader of disciple-making and equipping. It is a role with broad responsibilities, one that can best be described by the words "catalyst" and "player-coach." As a catalyst that brings about change, I introduce and embed the seeds of a new discipling culture within the existing congregational culture, and I spur and provoke people towards adopting, practicing, and reproducing the new. As a player-coach, I both invest myself in discipling relationships with others (thus "playing the game" and providing a model), and I also step back to instruct them on how to do it (thus being a coach and providing the teaching).

I work at both the macro and micro levels, both with the congregation as a whole and with smaller groups and individuals, both leading and teaching from up front and modeling and influencing from up close. While on one hand I do many of the things expected of a pastor (teaching, preaching, leading worship, working with elders and staff), on the other hand I also model, equip, encourage, and challenge people to practice and live out their discipleship in ways that stretch them beyond their familiar paradigms. It is a grand, all-encompassing task; after all, as I sometimes say, "Discipleship is not just one of the walls holding up the house; it is the whole house. It is not just a slice of the pie; it is the whole pie."

Ministry Challenge for this Doctoral Project

IPC has many good things going as they pursue and live out their mission. First, there is no need to convince them of the priority of discipleship and disciple-making as

Bullock and other leaders have already done much of the hard work of organizational change in clarifying the church's mission and setting the overall direction. By and large, the congregation is united in this and most people are at least familiar with the phrase, "to make disciples who make disciples." Second, they are Christ-centered and committed to the Scriptures, which are the two fundamental elements that define and give shape to what it means to be and make disciples: Jesus, of course, is the master disciple-maker, and the New Testament not only shows that Jesus made disciples, as did Paul and those in the early church, but also how they made disciples. Third, IPC's ongoing engagement in missions, outreach, and service means that many in the congregation are already actively living out their discipleship, for, as Chapter 3 will examine in more detail, discipleship and mission are woven together and cannot be divorced from one another.

At the same time, IPC must wrestle with and answer some key questions if they are to fully live out their mission—not just to make disciples, but "to make disciples who make disciples." While many view discipleship primarily in terms of gaining information and knowledge about God, Jesus, and the Bible,[28] how do they practice discipleship as obedience-based training (see, for example, Mt 7:24-27; 28:20)? Gifted preachers and teachers have been part of their history, but how can they be equipped and encouraged to teach one another (as well as people outside the church) to read, understand, and apply the Scriptures as the Bible itself exhorts them to do (see, for example, Col 3:16)? What does it look like for them to be everyday missionaries where they live, work, and play and not just when they go overseas? How do they practice doing that together in a culture

[28] This is not unexpected given the Reformed tradition which emphasizes learning and the life of the mind, and in IPC being a highly-educated congregation themselves.

that prizes individualism, and in a suburban context where most people live highly mobile and fragmented lives?

Perhaps the biggest question in helping IPC live out their disciple-making mission is: "What does it mean for them to be the church and not just go to church?" For almost thirty-five years, they have gathered on their Irvine campus for worship and used it as a base of ministry operations. Knowing their history, it is understandable that many congregants and leaders have a predominantly attractional mentality and will likely have at least some level of resistance or hesitancy when it comes to taking on a more missional commitment and posture. In fact, trying to help them shift their mindset may be perceived by some as a criticism or judgment on how they have done things in the past. Change in this area will therefore need to be brought about slowly and carefully, in a way that both honors and affirms IPC's past history of fruitful ministry while also moving forward in pursuit of the church's mission as presently articulated. For ultimately "to make disciples who make disciples" means people who are followers of Jesus helping other people follow Jesus, and so it is crucial they shift in their (self-)understanding from church as a place to church as a people in order to become the disciple-making force that Jesus has called them to be.[29]

[29] If pressed, many congregants likely would define "church" as the people. But given the formative power of language which both creates and reflects culture, many people default to talking about and referring to church as the place, and, for all intents and purposes, for them it is.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews six books that help make the case biblically, theologically, and practically for IPC to develop a more missional mentality and posture. The first two books consider the theology of the Church and mission in general. The next two speak to missional communities as one particular expression of the church. The last two give recommendations for some practices, patterns, and rhythms, and how to train people in everyday discipleship and mission.

The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit **by Craig Van Gelder**

Against the backdrop of North America becoming an increasingly post-Christian mission field, Craig Van Gelder examines the missionary nature of the Church. While missiology (the study of missions) and ecclesiology (the study of the church) have often been treated as separate theological disciplines, Van Gelder merges the two into what he calls "a missiological ecclesiology"[1] to describe what the Church is called to be and do.

[1] Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 31.

Foundational to his argument is that God himself is a missionary: the Father sent the Son to save the world; then the Father and Son together sent the Spirit to create the Church; and now the Spirit empowers and guides the Church in being God's people and presence in the world. Therefore, as Van Gelder explains, "The church is missionary by nature because God has sent it on a mission in the world under the leading of the Spirit. . . . Just as God is a missionary God, so the church is to be a missionary church."[2] Van Gelder goes on to consider the nuances of this nature: the Church is both holy and human, both universal and local, both unified and diverse, both institutional (in the sense of having been historically established by the apostles) and sent into the world (as the apostles were sent to make disciples of all nations). In short, mission is not just something the Church does as an activity or function, but what the Church is as part of its essential nature.

Only after examining the Church's missionary nature does Van Gelder proceed to discuss the Church's ministry and organization. The order is important, as Van Gelder points out, "The church is. The church does what it is. The church organizes what it does."[3] Just as God's Spirit created and now leads the Church, so the Church's ministry is also a work of the Spirit. Apart from the Spirit, the Church has no life and power, for it is the Spirit who gives gifts both to the church as a community (particularly as local congregations) as well as to individuals and leaders within the church. And while organization is both natural and needed as the church grows and flourishes, it must be consistent with the church's missionary nature and give support to the church's ministry.

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[2] Ibid., 98.

[3] Ibid., 37.

As Van Gelder points out, "church polity must never become an end in itself . . . [it] must always be seen as contextual and provisional."[4]

By design, Van Gelder devotes most of his book to exploring the missionary nature of the Church. While he brings up some points for practical application, they are discussed relatively briefly. Overall, this book is a healthy reminder and ongoing challenge for the church—particularly one with IPC's history and culture—to be the church and to live out their missionary nature as they are led by God's Spirit.

The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission by Christopher J. H. Wright

In his previous book, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*,[5] Christopher Wright argued that the mission of God is what unifies the Bible from creation to new creation. In this follow-up to that book, Wright considers a number of major biblical-theological themes to answer the question, "If the Bible renders to us the grand mission of God through all generations of history, what does it tell us about the mission of God's people in each generation, including our own? What is our mission?"[6]

Roughly following the four major movements in the overall story of the Bible—creation, fall, redemption, and new creation—Wright begins by looking at Genesis 1-2 and "People Who Care for Creation." He next examines the life and story of Abraham in "People Who Are a Blessing to the Nations." Importantly, Wright points out that God's

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[4] Ibid., 161.

[5] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

[6] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 17.

call on Abraham (Gn 12:1-3) is "the foundation on which the whole thrust of God's mission, including what is usually referred to as 'The Great Commission' in Matthew 28, is based."[7] In "People Who Are Redeemed for Redemptive Living," attention is given first to God saving Israel in the Exodus event, then to God saving the world through Jesus' work on the cross. In light of this, Wright passionately urges the Church always to keep the cross central as they live out their mission: "Ultimately, all that will be there in the new, redeemed creation will be there because of the cross. And conversely all that will not be there (suffering, tears, sin, Satan, sickness, oppression, corruption, decay and death), will not be there because they have been defeated and destroyed by the cross. . . . It is exceedingly good news. It is the font of all our mission."[8]

The following two chapters—"People Who Present God to the World" and "People Who Attract Others to God"—touch on some of the more attractional/centripetal aspects of mission. "People Who Proclaim the Gospel of Christ" highlights the devotion God's people must have to Jesus if they are to live on mission; for Jesus not only announces the good news of God's reign, he is the good news as the fulfillment of God's promises throughout the Old Testament. In "People Who Send and Are Sent," Wright looks at the more missional/centrifugal aspects of mission based on the missionary nature, character, and activity of God himself. This is followed by "People Who Live and Work in the Public Square" and "People Who Praise and Pray" which examine the ways God's people work, worship, and witness in the world. Wright ends by drawing together the various strands of the mission of God's people under the Great Commission in which

[7] Ibid., 73.

[8] Ibid., 111.

Jesus charges his disciples to "go and make disciples" (Mt 28:18-20). In this, the church has been given a "mission beyond evangelism . . . a self-replicating mandate that we will never 'complete' . . . in the sense that the making of disciples, and the rediscipling of those who have formerly been evangelized, are tasks that go on through multiple lives and generations."[9]

Given Wright's intention to look broadly at what the Bible says about the mission of the church, understandably he does not address every biblical doctrine that could relate to mission in general. Overall, this is a helpful resource for teaching and showing how God's mission and the related mission of his people are clearly evident throughout the entirety of the biblical narrative: the Bible is about a missionary God who redeems for himself a missionary people who now participate in God's mission with him.

The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch

Two of the leading thinkers and practitioners in the missional church/discipleship movement and missionaries to the US, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch share their conviction that the strategic focus of the church, particularly in the west, must shift from revitalization to mission. They assert, "In our view, the church should be missional rather than institutional. The church should define itself in terms of its mission—to take the gospel to and incarnate the gospel within a specific cultural context."[10]

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[9] Ibid., 284-285.

[10] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), xi. This is in contrast to their definition of "institutional": "Historically . . . church leaders as well as Christians in general have regarded the church as an institution to which outsiders must come in order to receive a certain product, namely, the gospel and all its associated benefits."

The book has four main parts. Part One describes the current western/American church landscape, one in which Christendom has eroded, post-Christendom has emerged, and many churches unable to make the requisite shift. As Frost and Hirsch observe, "While the Christendom story no longer defines Western culture, it still remains the primary definer of the church's self-understanding in almost every Western nation, including and perhaps especially the United States. . . . While in reality we are in a post-Christendom context, the Western church still operates for the most part in a Christendom mode."[11] Calling for the church to understand itself once again as a missionary movement, the authors introduce some key characteristics of the missional church which they take up in more detail in the rest of the book.

Part Two considers the "Incarnational Ecclesiology" of missional churches. Just as God in Jesus put on human flesh and entered our world, the authors explain that missional churches seek to live out "a real and abiding incarnational presence among a group of people."[12] This entails a "go to them" approach rather than the "come to us" approach practiced by most institutional churches, and emphasizes building relationships and engaging the culture so that missionary disciples become insiders among those they are trying to reach. Such an approach is not overly dependent on a having a particular church campus or building, as the authors note:

> It seems most churches that don't have their own sanctuary building are devoted to getting one, but we're not so sure this is always necessary. . . . Where the church is thriving in Asia, Africa, and Latin and South America, many churches are meeting in homes, under trees, beside rivers, in cafes, and in public meeting

[11] Ibid., 8, 9.

[12] Ibid., 39.

> halls. It's in the West, where the institutional church is slowly dying, that there seems to be such a reliance on church buildings.[13]

Instead, Frost and Hirsch encourage missional church leaders to innovate and experiment for the sake of the Gospel: "Don't think church, think mission!"[14]

Part Three discusses the ways missional churches live out a "Messianic Spirituality." Frost and Hirsch point out that on the matter of faith (and faithfulness to the Gospel), whereas the Hellenistic worldview tends to see faith (Greek *pistis*) as a kind of knowledge, belief, or creed, the Hebraic worldview sees faith (Hebrew *enumah*) as something active and practiced, a kind of trust lived out. Arguing for a renewed emphasis on the latter, they write, "Creed soon dominated trust, and it is our contention that this is still the case. We believe that this must be reversed if we are to have a more engaging, missional faith. Creed is important, but it ought not to be dominant."[15] While missional churches continue to proclaim the Gospel, they do so while living out their spirituality as loving, hospitable, generous communities of faith that serve and bless others in ways that reveal the goodness of God to those outside the Christian faith. This includes using church buildings as missional tools that help "create proximity spaces between God's people and the surrounding communities," such as running a sports camp, operating a medical center, opening a café, developing a community vegetable garden, and the like.[16]

In Part Four, Frost and Hirsch describe the "Apostolic Leadership" needed for missional churches to thrive. They call for a fivefold leadership and overall church

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[13] Ibid., 69.

[14] Ibid., 81.

[15] Ibid., 133.

[16] Ibid., 153.

ministry model based on Ephesians 4 that recognizes the giftings and functions of apostles, prophets, and evangelists in addition to the traditionally more accepted and understood roles of shepherds and teachers.[17] After addressing the need for missional church leaders to practice creativity and imagination, Frost and Hirsch end with a discussion on how to organize and structure these new gospel communities in ways that are organic, reproducible, and sustainable. They point to the house churches seen throughout the New Testament as the best model for these missional communities:

> Not only is this more missionally responsive in the new context but, we believe, it is also much closer to New Testament ecclesiology and missions practice. The household church unit was the primary unit of missional community in the New Testament. Today whether they meet in homes like the contemporary house-church movement or not is irrelevant. What is important is that they tend to be smaller, more diverse, less organized, life-oriented, missional, relational, faith communities.[18]

Frost and Hirsch have particularly written this book for new, emerging missional communities and their leaders and do not address explicitly how established, institutional churches can make the shift from attractional to missional. But by painting a compelling picture of what missional churches look like and providing practical descriptions of what missional churches do, they have given churches and leaders looking to make the shift both a vision to pursue and a place from which to start.

The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups
by Joseph R. Myers

In this book, Joseph Myers offers a framework to describe how people experience community and a sense of belonging, and how they connect with others. He begins by

[17] Ibid., 170-171.

[18] Ibid., 211.

exposing several commonly held myths about what it means to belong (more time, more commitment, more purpose, more personality, more small groups will equal more belonging). He then introduces the foundation for the rest of his book—the work done in the 1960s by Edward T. Hall who identified four spaces of human interaction. These spaces are: public, social, personal, and intimate.

According to Hall, in public space a person stands twelve or more feet away from others; in social space, they are four to twelve feet apart; in personal space, they are eighteen inches to four feet apart; and in intimate space, from actually touching to eighteen inches apart.[19] Myers applies these spaces to human relationships and shows that people connect to others in all four spaces and do so in significant ways. He suggests that the goal in relationships is not necessarily intimacy: "Would all relationships be better if they were intimate? Think of all the relationships in your life, from bank teller to sister to coworker to spouse. Could we even adequately sustain all these relationships if they were intimate?"[20] Rather, the goal should be healthy community achieved through meaningful connections in all four spaces.

In the context of a church or congregation, Myers suggests that pastors and leaders facilitate opportunities and environments for people to connect meaningfully in all four spaces, not just in one or two. Importantly, this does not mean simply moving people through the various spaces: "I am not saying that we must process people from public to social to personal to intimate. . . . The secret is to see all connections as

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[19] Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 460-465, 709-712.

[20] Ibid., Loc. 1000-1001.

significant."[21] Cautioning church leaders not to try and control people, Myers adds, "The four spaces are not an assembly line for growing community. . . . We are not building cars. We are developing community among the fragile connections humans hold."[22] Towards the end, Myers shows how Jesus connected relationally with people in all four spaces: "Many belonged to Jesus in different ways. The Bible mentions the multitudes, a room full, a crowd of seventy, twelve apostles, the inner circle of Peter, James, and John. All experienced community with Jesus."[23]

Myers does not intend his book to be thoroughly biblical, so he does not go on to apply the four spaces to the early church as described in the New Testament. Rather, what Myers has done in considering Hall's work and applying it to congregational life is provide sociological insight and support for church leaders to rethink how people in the church connect with and belong to others. Critical to this doctoral project is the concept of social space which applies directly to missional communities. Indeed, while Myers does not use the language of missional communities, he urges churches and their leaders to focus and give attention to social space: "If a congregation would promote this space as an important part of a person's search to belong and if the congregation would help individuals grow in this specific space, I believe you would find a lot of spillover health into the other spaces."[24]

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[21] Ibid., Loc. 1201-1204.

[22] Ibid., Loc. 2023-2025.

[23] Ibid., Loc. 2097-2098.

[24] Ibid., Loc. 2730-2731.

Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did by Mike Breen and Steve Cockram

In the mid-1990s, Breen began pastoring St. Thomas' Church in Sheffield, England, a congregation with roots in the traditional, mainline Church of England. Through experimenting with and eventually implementing missional communities and various disciple-making practices, Breen helped the congregation grow to become the largest church in England (and probably in Europe) by the early-2000s.[25] In *Building a Discipling Culture*, Breen and co-author Cockram take an in-depth look at how to make disciples based on their experiences from almost thirty years of discipling people in post-Christian Europe.

Breen and Cockram begin by highlighting some foundational principles about discipleship. They assert that church is what results from effective discipleship, not the other way around. They observe from Jesus' way of discipling people that discipleship is both an invitation into a relationship and a challenge to change. They explain that to be a disciple is to be a lifelong learner of Jesus, one who does what Jesus did and eventually becomes the kind of person Jesus is. All of this means that discipleship must be pursued both intentionally and systematically.

They devote the bulk of the book to teaching a discipling language Breen has developed over the years called LifeShapes. This is a collection of eight shapes, each connected to a foundational teaching or principle from Jesus' life, that together capture a kind of discipleship DNA. The shapes are not meant to be exhaustive but rather serve as a starting point upon which disciples can build and grow, practice and reproduce in their

[25] Mike Breen, *Leading Kingdom Movements* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2013), 45, 77. Breen shares the story of St. Thomas' Church in Chapters 4 and 5.

own lives, and transfer to others in turn. As Breen explains, "These simple shapes that form a discipling language give people handles for their own life, as well as the ability to remember and teach them to the people Jesus is calling them to disciple. It's never just about us. Are we giving the people in our communities (laity) the tools they need to disciple and lead out into mission? Those are whom this language is for."[26]

LifeShapes aims to teach disciples both what they ought to know as well as equip and train them for what they ought to do. The Circle teaches disciples to practice hearing and obeying God through the dual responses of repenting and believing. The Triangle provides a relational pattern and rhythm by which disciples imitate Jesus in living "Up" with God, "In" with other disciples, and "Out" to a hurting world. The Semi-Circle reminds disciples of the need for regular rest and Sabbath. The Square outlines how to train and raise up new leaders by delegating responsibility. The Pentagon summarizes the fivefold ministries in Ephesians 4 and explores disciples' personal calling and ministry functions, as well as how those functions are lived out by the wider church. The Hexagon leads disciples through the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, focusing on the character, kingdom, provision, forgiveness, guidance, and protection of God their heavenly Father. The Heptagon goes through seven signs of life as a kind of spiritual checkup for disciples. Lastly, the Octagon teaches disciples relational evangelism and mission based on Jesus' strategy of finding the Person of Peace (Mt 10; Lk 10).

Breen and Cockram caution pastors not to teach LifeShapes as a sermon series as that will likely come across as more information for people to know or ignore. Rather, they recommend LifeShapes be practiced in Discipleship Huddles of four to ten people

[26] Breen and Cockram, *Building a Discipling Culture*, Loc. 745-748.

where the information taught, the imitation that comes from sharing life with others, and the immersion into a discipling culture all come together to help disciples follow and obey Jesus.[27] They end the book by addressing the logistics and practicalities related to Discipleship Huddles.

Breen and Cockram acknowledge at the outset that theirs is neither the perfect nor the only way to make disciples.[28] But with LifeShapes they have not only introduced a discipling language that can be the seeds of a discipling culture, they have also provided the means by which reproduction and multiplication of disciples can take place given that the shapes and their related practices have a kind of built-in diagnostic component and are fairly simple, sustainable, and transferable.

T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution
by Steve Smith and Ying Kai

In the early-2000s, Ying Kai helped establish one of the fastest growing church-planting movements in one of Asia's most densely populated urban areas. Kai's initial goal of planting two hundred churches was achieved in just three months, and by the power of God's Spirit tens of thousands of people came to Christ and thousands of churches[29] were planted as part of the movement.[30] The discipleship principles and

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[27] Ibid., Loc. 752-755.

[28] Ibid., Loc. 136-139.

[29] These are smaller house churches or church-like small groups that may be part of a larger worshiping community.

[30] Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 214-215. "Today the movement might best be described as a sort of super church-planting movement. It has become so large that it is impossible to track all that is going on."

process Kai learned to apply in that movement form the basis of this book which details how to train new Christian disciples to share the gospel with others and make other disciple-making disciples. Called "Training for Trainers," or "T4T" for short, Kai and co-author Steve Smith emphasize the concept of training disciples to obey and do what Jesus says particularly in evangelism and disciple-making: "Teaching conveys the idea of transferring knowledge, but training conveys the idea of changing behavior."[31]

The book has three main parts. Part One lays the biblical and theological foundations for T4T by first referencing the original discipleship revolution sparked by God's Spirit in the book of Acts. The authors then share some discipleship principles from the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, as well as general principles from Jesus' parables related to the nature and coming of God's kingdom. They also spend significant time exploring the role and work of the Holy Spirit in convicting people of sin and bringing them to repentance, and in teaching and discipling them afterwards.

Part Two describes the overall T4T process in which God saves a person and helps them grow into a mature disciple who starts new discipling groups and trains others to do the same.[32] Ultimately, the goal is to build multiplying generations of trainers who make disciple-making disciples to at least the fourth generation (2 Tm 2:2),[33] but the process begins with sending people out to witness to unbelievers in their various circles of relationships. Here the authors emphasize loving accountability in the training groups that encourage obedience and action—although not everyone will do it. Leaders are

[31] Ibid., Loc. 565-566.

[32] Ibid., Loc. 1303-1304.

[33] Ibid., Loc. 1348-1349, 1364-72.

urged to give more attention to the roughly 20 percent who demonstrate their commitment by obedience and who will likely go on to become trainers of trainers.[34] The authors also recommend each training meeting (which lasts between two to three hours) follow "the three-thirds training process": the first third "looks back" and is made up of pastoral care, worship, accountability, and vision-casting; the second third "looks up" and is a Bible study or lesson that asks disciples to obey and pass on what they have learned; the last third "looks ahead" and involves practice, goal-setting, and prayer for God's anointing and for God to open the hearts of the people disciples will encounter.

Part Three outlines how to start the T4T process in a particular community. Beginning with casting vision to Christian believers to reach the lost, the authors unpack various other components needed to launch and sustain a disciple-making/church-planting movement. These include finding and connecting with the lost whom God has already prepared to receive the good news, evangelism and sharing the gospel, discipleship and training new believers, baptism and solidifying commitment, forming churches out of training groups, and reproducing leaders. Throughout these chapters, the authors emphasize simplicity so that any new believer can quickly reproduce the training practices in their own lives and transfer them to others.

Although Smith and Kai have written this book primarily for church planters in relatively unchurched areas, they provide one chapter in which they take some of the T4T principles and apply them to a churched or post-churched context. Indeed, the primary values of T4T—keeping things simple, aiming for reproduction, expecting every disciple

[34] Ibid., Loc. 1723-1725. "Around the world, even in the best of situations, we find that only about 20% of those we train will become trainers of trainers. These are normal kingdom dynamics and it rarely rises higher than this. There are also times that we get no trainers out of our groups."

to disciple, exercising mutual accountability, practicing discipleship as obedience-based training, praying and relying on the power of God's Spirit—particularly speak to this doctoral project as key factors that contribute to the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches.

CHAPTER 3

A THEOLOGY OF MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

While missional communities as an expression of the church may be new to some, their roots can be traced back to the New Testament. As Reggie McNeal says, "In many ways the rise of missional communities takes the church back to its early days, when it was a movement, before it became church-as-we-know-it. Before it became church as congregation."[1] In fact, the biblical and theological foundations of missional communities can be identified even further back in the Scriptures to the very nature, being, and activity of God himself. While the distinction is sometimes made between "mission" (singular) as referring to God's overarching plan for his world, and "missions" (plural) as referring to the numerous ways in which God's people participate in his mission, for the purposes of this doctoral project, the survey of Scripture in this chapter will focus on mission, from the Latin *missio*, as primarily having to do with the actions of sending and being sent: What does the Bible have to say about God's people being sent to join him on his mission, and how does this shape an understanding of missional communities—their formation, structure, and practice?

[1] Reggie McNeal, *Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 371-372.

God as Missional Community

Any discussion about missional communities must begin with the recognition that God himself is the original missional community. God is the original community, the three persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who exist together as the Godhead, in relationship with one another, partnering together in the works of creation and new creation, and pointing to and glorifying each other (see, for example, Gn 1:1-3; Jn 1:1-3, 14, 18). As Gareth Icenogle points out, "God as Trinity . . . exist[s] in divine community, in dialogue with other members of the God-self, an intracommunicating group who also created humanity to exist in group intracommunication."[2]

God is also the original missionary. As early as Genesis 3, God goes looking for Adam and Eve when they disobey and sin against him (Gn 3:8-9). God takes the initiative. He longs for and seeks after them even though their sin and rebellion have broken their relationship with him and ruined his good and beautiful creation. Indeed, the grand narrative of the Bible is ultimately about God's mission—what he has done and what he is doing to redeem, rescue, and restore all that he has made.

As the first and primary missionary, God calls people to join in what he is doing and sends them out as agents of his mission. God tells Abraham, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gn 12:1-3). Sometimes called the great commission of the Old Testament, this is the first specific statement of God's overarching mission in the world and the first clear

[2] Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 21.

instance of God sending someone out to participate in that mission; in this regard, Abraham can rightly be regarded as the pioneer in mission.[3] God repeats his promise to bless the nations through Abraham and his descendants four more times (Gn 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). As they increase in number, they eventually become the people of Israel. On one hand, Israel is God's "treasured possession," set apart as "a holy nation" and called to be different from all the other nations and peoples of the world (Ex 19:5-6; Lv 20:26; Dt 14:2). On the other hand, just as Abraham was chosen to be a channel of God's blessing to others, so Israel is to be "a kingdom of priests" (Ex 19:6)—a servant people who reflect and mediate God's grace to the world. While Israel's participation in God's mission is primarily attractional, there are notable instances in the Old Testament where God sends people out as his missionary agents. Joseph (Gn 45:5-8; 50:20; Ps 105:17), Moses and his brother Aaron (Ex 3:10-15; Ps 105:26), and prophets like Isaiah (Is 6:8-9), Jeremiah (Jer 1:7; 26:15), and Jonah (Jon 1:2; 3:2) are all such examples; while to some degree they can each be described as reluctant, unlikely, and even unintentional missionaries, God nevertheless used each of them to fulfill his purposes among the nations.

In the New Testament, God's missionary heart and sending nature first revealed in Genesis 3 is seen more clearly. Matthew's Gospel notes that Jesus is sent first to Israel even as he extends God's blessing to Gentiles (Mt 15:24). Luke's Gospel adds that Jesus is sent both to preach good news and to be good news related to the coming of God's kingdom (Lk 4:18-21, 43). In John's Gospel, Jesus is sent to speak God's word (Jn 1:14;

[3] Arthur F. Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 57.

3:34; 7:16) and to do God's work (4:34; 6:38), and accordingly people are urged to believe and trust in him as the one sent by God (5:24; 6:29). In fact, Jesus' sentness is a major theme in John: Arthur Glasser counts forty-four references to Jesus being sent by the Father and concludes that "the Fourth Gospel is uniquely concerned with God as Sender."[4] Ultimately, God the Father sends Jesus the Son to save the world and remedy the problem of human sin (Jn 3:16-17; Gal 4:4; Rom 8:3; 1 Jn 4:9-10, 14).

The Father also sends the Holy Spirit who anoints, fills, leads, and empowers Jesus for his mission in the world (Lk 4:1, 15, 18; Ac 10:38). The Father and the Son together then send the Spirit to remind disciples of Jesus' teaching and to strengthen them to carry on his work (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7ff.; 20:22; Ac 1:8). Thus there is a kind of double and reciprocal sending among the persons of the Trinity: the Father sends the Son and the Spirit; the Spirit sends the Son, and the Son sends the Spirit; only the Father remains unsent. In short, God is the missionary God: he is both the God who sends and the God who is sent, the original missional community.

Missionary Disciples and the Missional Church

In light of who God is, there are significant implications for what it means to be Jesus' disciples and to be the Church. For just as God called and sent people out to participate in his mission in the world, so Jesus does the same when he calls people to follow him and be his disciples. In fact, throughout the Gospels, Jesus consistently defines discipleship in terms of mission; the two are inextricably linked. As Eddie Gibbs

[4] Ibid., 230, 243.

puts it, "Disciples are those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus, whose first commands are "Come, follow," and whose last is "Go" (Mt 4:19; 28:19).[5]

Jesus' calling his first disciples is instructive for understanding the nature of discipleship. He says to the two sets of fishing brothers, Simon and Andrew, James and John, "Come, follow me . . . and I will send you out to fish for people" (Mt 4:19; Mk 1:17). Three key truths about discipleship emerge from this call. First, discipleship is about a relationship with Jesus. Disciples are to follow Jesus, much like students with their teacher or apprentices with their master. They are to surrender the leadership of their lives over to him, and to spend time listening to him, learning from him, and eventually becoming like him. As Dallas Willard wrote, "If I am Jesus' disciple that means I am with him to learn from him to be like him. . . . I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I."[6]

Second, discipleship involves and leads to mission, and mission is the context within which discipleship happens. Disciples not only learn from Jesus but do so as they follow and join Jesus on God's mission—in this case, they are to "fish for people" and help them enter God's kingdom (Mt 4:17; 13:47). In essence, Jesus' disciples are missionary disciples; there is no other kind. Breen expresses it this way: "Being a "disciple" while not actively engaging in mission as a way of life is [like] asking for a

[5] Eddie Gibbs, *LeadershipNext: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 76.

[6] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 276, 283.

cheeseburger with no burger. Both are necessary. To be a disciple is to be a missionary, and to be a missionary requires that we be disciples."[7]

Third, discipleship and mission are done in community. When Jesus calls the fishermen, he addresses them collectively. The "you" is plural; he is saying, "I will send both/all of you out to fish for people" (4:19b). Just as fishing in those days was done in teams and the key to their success was the strength of their nets (cf. 4:18, 21), so Jesus sends disciples out on mission together—in pairs, groups, teams, and families—and their "nets" are how they follow Jesus and practice a Jesus-shaped way of life together that is gracious and winsome and draws other people in to also experience life in God's kingdom. As Frost and Hirsch explain, "The web of relationships, friendships, and acquaintances that Christians normally have makes up the net into which not-yet-Christians will swim."[8]

This then is Jesus' basic template for what it means to be his disciples, and over the course of his earthly ministry he trains his followers to live it out. He selects and chooses twelve apostles, "that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mk 3:14-15). He calls his disciples "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Mt 5:13-16) to describe the impact and influence they are to have in the world. He instructs them to pray and ask God "to send out workers into his harvest field" (Mt 9:38). He then sends them out two-by-two in answer to that prayer with instructions to do the very things he himself has been doing—

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[7] Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders: From Half-Hearted Volunteers to a Mobilized Kingdom Force* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2012), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 481-483.

[8] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 44.

preaching, teaching, and healing as demonstrations of the reality of God's kingdom come on earth (cf. Mt 4:23; 9:35; 10:5-8; see also Lk 9:1-2ff.; 10:1-9ff.). Going in his authority and as his representatives, Jesus explains that acceptance or rejection of the disciples and their mission is tantamount to acceptance or rejection of him and of the Father who has sent him (Mt 10:40; Lk 10:16; Jn 13:20). After his resurrection, Jesus instructs them to carry on his work and sends them into the world in the same way the Father has sent him (Jn 17:18; 20:21). Having spent three years discipling and leading them in his mission, he tells them to do with others what he has done with them: he commissions them to "go and make disciples of all nations" by baptizing and teaching people to obey his commands (Mt 28:19-20a; see also Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24:46-49); they are to do this together as indicated by Jesus' use of the second person plural; and in this context of mission, even though he will no longer physically be with them, he promises and assures them of his ongoing presence and power (Mt 28:18, 20b).

Beyond the Gospels, the book of Acts begins with Jesus sending the disciples out to be his witnesses, starting in Jerusalem and going to the ends of the earth (Ac 1:8). When God pours out his Spirit on Jesus' disciples, the church is birthed (1:4: 2:1-4ff.), and it is the Spirit who leads and empowers the church to carry on Jesus' work and mission in the world. The Spirit emboldens Peter in preaching about Jesus (2:14ff.; 4:8), gives Stephen wisdom in defending the new Christian movement (6:10; 7:55), and directs Philip in cross-cultural evangelism (8:29, 39). Just as Jesus' earthly ministry reached beyond the Jews to the Gentiles, the Spirit initiates the church's Gentile mission first by speaking to Peter in a vision (10:19; 11:12) and then guiding the church leaders in Jerusalem to accept Gentile converts (15:28). It is the Spirit who selects and sends

Barnabas and Saul/Paul from the Antioch church (13:2-4), empowers Paul in spiritual warfare (13:9), and guides Paul and his missionary teams on their subsequent journeys (16:6-7; 20:22-23).

Although the latter chapters of Acts focus primarily on Paul, there are numerous references both in Acts and in Paul's letters to his many mission partners. Barnabas and Silas, both with ties to the Jerusalem and Antioch churches, are two of Paul's earliest teammates (Ac 11:22; 13:2; 15:22, 40). Luke, the doctor, is a frequent companion (16:10; 20:5; 27:1). Priscilla and Aquila, along with numerous other men and women who are part of the church in Rome, are acknowledged as co-workers in Christ (Ac 18:2-3, 26; Rom 16:3, 7, 9, 12). There is a later team of seven individuals, all from places where Paul had earlier planted the Gospel (Ac 20:4). Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus are sent from the church in Corinth to encourage him in his work (1 Cor 16:17-18). Tychicus from the church in Ephesus proves to be one of Paul's most trusted teammates (Ac 20:4; Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; 2 Tm 4:12; Ti 3:12). Epaphroditus from the church in Philippi (Phil 2:25; 4:18), Epaphras from the church in Colosse (Col 1:7; 4:12), and Philemon (Phlm 1) are all commended for their partnership in the work of the Gospel. Paul later relies on Timothy to carry on the work in Ephesus (1 Tm 1:3; 4:12-16), and calls on Titus to do the same in Crete (Ti 1:5).

In addition to his many individual teammates, Paul also establishes mission partnerships with various churches. To the church in Rome, he writes of his desire to give and receive mutual encouragement, and hopes that they will help him on his way to plant the Gospel in Spain (Rom 1:11-12; 15:24). He expresses thanks for the church in Philippi, for their "partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" and for their

faithful financial support (Phil 1:4-5; 4:10-18). To the churches in Ephesus and Colosse, he asks them to support him in prayer, that God will grant him courage in proclaiming the good news and open doors of mission opportunity (Eph 6:19-20; Col 4:3). And to the church in Thessalonica, he praises them for being a model to other believers as the Gospel radiates out from them (1 Thes 1:7-8).

These themes of following Jesus in discipleship and mission both individually and collectively extend through the rest of the New Testament. The author of Hebrews describes Jesus as the "apostle"—the one sent by God—and as "the pioneer and perfecter of faith," and accordingly exhorts readers to faithfully follow Jesus by fixing their thoughts and eyes on him (Heb 3:1; 12:2-3). Peter picks up the Old Testament imagery used of Israel and applies it to his Christian readers when he describes them as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation," and calls them to live in a way that makes God known to the people around them (1 Pt 2:9-12; cf. Ex 19:5-6; Lv 20:26). John commends Gaius for sending, supporting, and working with itinerant missionaries (3 Jn 5-8), and paints in Revelation the grand vision of God's redemptive mission fully completed when multitudes of people from all the nations of the world gather together to worship God in the beauty of new heaven and new earth (Rv 5:9; 7:9; 22:1-5).

In summary, the church in the New Testament is the Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered community of Jesus' missionary disciples who are sent to proclaim the Gospel and participate in God's mission in the world. Participation in that mission is not restricted to a select few but for all disciples, and churches are not only the gathered communities of Jesus' disciples but also important sending and support bases for advancing the Gospel throughout the world. Wright puts it this way:

> The mission of God's people, then, is not some external structure built by the church itself—a program or a strategy devised by an institution. Sending in mission is a participation in the life of God. The mission of God's people, in this dimension of sending and being sent, is to be caught up within the dynamic sending and being sent that God the Holy Trinity has done and continues to do for the salvation of the world and the revelation of his truth.[9]

God sent his Son, God sent his Spirit; and under the leadership of the Son and in the power of the Spirit, God sends his church.

Church as Missional Community

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the biblical roots of missional communities can be traced back to the early church; specifically, to the *oikos* or "house/household"[10] church model found throughout Acts and the rest of the New Testament. After God's Spirit comes on Jesus' disciples at Pentecost, Peter preaches the first Christian/Christ-centered sermon and 3,000 people respond and are baptized. They join the fellowship of believers and the Christian church is birthed in Jerusalem (Ac 2:1-40). Being predominantly Jewish, they continue to worship at the temple, but from the start they also gather "in their homes" to practice their distinctiveness as Jesus' disciples (2:46). Correspondingly, the apostles proclaim the Gospel and teach about Jesus both "in the temple courts and from house to house" (5:42). However, when persecution forces the majority of the church to leave Jerusalem, the scattered disciples share the Gospel wherever they go (8:1-5ff.). It is from this point on that the individual house/household emerges as the prime organizing structure in the growing Christian movement.

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[9] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 211.

[10] *Oikos* can mean a literal house or dwelling; it can also refer to the set of relationships within a household or family. See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Walter Bauer's 5th ed., 1958 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 560.

At Caesarea, a Gentile church is birthed when Peter visits the Roman centurion Cornelius who has gathered with relatives and friends in his home to listen to God's word; God's Spirit comes upon them and they are baptized as new believers (Ac 10:24, 44-48). In Philippi, the businesswoman Lydia responds to Paul's message and "she and the members of her household" are baptized, and become a new church (16:14-15, 40); a Roman jailer also responds to Paul and Silas' message about Jesus, and "he and his whole family" believe in God (16:31-34). In Corinth, a church is planted when "Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household" respond to Paul's ministry and believe in Jesus (18:8). Indeed, for Paul, the strategic importance of homes in the organization and structure of the early church is clearly evident both before and after his conversion: as Saul the persecutor he systematically sought to destroy the church by "going from house to house" (8:3); as Paul the missionary he builds up the church by regularly teaching both publicly and "from house to house" (20:20).

Paul's letters contain numerous references to various churches meeting in different homes. He asks the Christians in Rome to greet "the church that meets at [Priscilla and Aquila's] house," "those who belong to the household of Aristobulus," and "those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord" (Rom 16:5, 10-11). He greets Asyncritus and Philologus as well as "the other brothers and sisters with them . . . and all the Lord's people who are with them" (Rom 16:14-15). He mentions Gauis "whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy" (Rom 16:23). He asks the Christians in Colosse to "give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house" (Col 4:15). Paul mentions "the household of Stephanas" as the first converts in the province of Achaia who become his fellow workers in ministry (1

Cor 16:15). To the Philippian Christians, he passes along special greetings from "those who belong to Caesar's household" (Phil 4:22). He acknowledges the support and encouragement "the household of Onesiphorus" gave to him when he was in prison (2 Tm 1:16). And when he writes to Philemon, he addresses also "the church that meets in your home" (Phlm 2). Additionally, Paul's instructions about worship suggest that both baptism (1 Cor 1:16) and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:18-26ff.) were sometimes celebrated in households; more clear is the qualification that only proven heads of households were to become church leaders (1 Tm 3:2-7, 12).

Importantly, it should be noted that in terms of their size, the *oikos* churches mentioned in the New Testament were like extended families—larger than the modern nuclear family but smaller than today's typical congregation of a hundred or more people. Everett Ferguson explains, "The family consisted of the entire household, including husband, wife, children, sometimes other relatives, and slaves."[11] D. W. B. Robinson provides a further description:

> The word 'household' . . . is a unit of society which meets us everywhere in the Roman and Hellenistic, as well as the Jewish world of the 1st century. It consisted not only of the lord (Gk. *kyrios*), master (Grk. *despotes*), or paterfamilias, his wife, children and slaves, but also of various dependents, such as servants, employees and even 'clients' (e.g. freedmen or friends) who voluntarily joined themselves to a household for the sake of mutual benefits.[12]

Taking together all the biblical references as well as the social-historical evidence, it is clear that the early church organized and expressed itself as various households. Tim Keller explains, "[T]he churches Paul planted (in fact all of the Christian churches for

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[11] Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 65.

[12] D. W. B. Robinson, "Family, Household" in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., eds. I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer and D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 363.

almost two hundred years) were household churches. . . . [I]n the early church the household church was the basic building block of the movement."[13] Robinson notes, "[Either] the household was regarded as a church in itself, or that the church in a given locality met within the scope of one household's hospitality."[14] Likewise, Mike Breen and Alex Absalom conclude, "The New Testament's instruction and pattern reveal a church that can be called a household of people on a mission."[15] In summary, *oikos*/house churches were the organizing unit by which the early Christian movement grew and spread as missional disciples and churches proclaimed the Gospel across the 1st century world, and they are the biblical model on which missional communities are based.

Sociological and Missiological Support for Missional Communities

At this juncture, it is helpful to revisit Edward T. Hall's four spaces of community (see the review in Chapter 2 of Myers' book, *The Search to Belong*) and consider how they inform missional communities as an expression of church life. In the Gospels, the four spaces can be traced in Jesus' interactions with others: he relates to the crowds in public space (see, for example, Lk 5:1); to the seventy-two disciples in social space (10:1); to the core group of twelve in personal space (9:1); and to his three closest associates, Peter, James, and John, in intimate space (9:28). The four spaces can also be identified in the life of the early church: they proclaim the Gospel to crowds and gather at the Jerusalem temple in public space (see, for example, Ac 2:14, 46); they organize and

[13] Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 10327, 10332.

[14] Robinson, "Family, Household," 363.

[15] Mike Breen and Alex Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2010), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 760-761.

multiply as house churches in social space; they serve together as itinerant missionary teams in personal space (20:4); and they mentor and encourage one another in intimate space (13:4-5).

In many American churches, there are typically clear parallels to three of the four spaces. There is the public space in which a hundred or more people gather in a weekend worship service. There is the personal space in which various small groups consisting of four to fifteen people meet for study and/or fellowship. There is the intimate space in which an individual commits to share more deeply with one or two others in closed accountability groups. Often missing, however, is the social space in which mid-sized groups consisting of twenty to fifty people practice discipleship and mission together. This is the space that missional communities seek to fill as shown in the table below:

Table 1. The Four Spaces Applied to the New Testament and the American Church

SPACE	JESUS	EARLY CHURCH	CHURCH PARALLEL
Public	Crowds	Crowds	Worship Service (100+ people)
Social	72 Disciples	*Oikos*/House Church	Missional Community (20-50 people)
Personal	12 Disciples	Missionary Team	Small Group (4-15 people)
Intimate	Peter, James, John	Paul and Barnabas	Accountability Partners (1-2 people)

Regarding human interaction, relationships, and community, Myers explains, "We do not experience belonging in only one or two of these spaces. All four contribute to our health and connectedness. We need connections in all four."[16] As such, while Myers does not explicitly mention missional communities, he advises church leaders to create

[16] Joseph R. Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 325.

intentional opportunities for relationships to be built and community to be experienced particularly in the social space.[17]

There is also evidence from the two-thirds world in which the *oikos*/household unit has played a strategic role in disciple-making and church-planting movements. The underground house church movement in China is perhaps the closest modern-day equivalent to the early church in the book of Acts. When the Communists took power in 1949 and subsequently banished all foreign missionaries and ministers, it was estimated that there were around two million Christians in China. By the 1980s, when foreign missionaries were allowed back in, the Christian movement had exploded with estimates of about sixty million Christians in China. More recent estimates have placed that number closer to eighty million.[18] OMF International, a long-established and well-respected missions agency, notes that the vast majority of Chinese Christians "meet in house churches; some isolated, others part of well-organized groups numbering several hundreds or thousands."[19]

Kai (see the review in Chapter 2 of his book, *T4T*), who was an instrumental part of what became a super church-planting movement in Asia, trains disciple-making church planters to pray for and share the gospel first with their *oikos*—their primary relational connections including their family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, marketplace and

[17] Myers, *The Search to Belong*, Loc. 2730-2731.

[18] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 19.

[19] OMF International, "China," omf.org, http://omf.org/us/portfolio-posts/china/ (accessed December 9, 2015).

business associates, as well as fellow social club or organization members.[20] Similarly, church planting trainer Stan Parks explains that in church-planting movements (CPMs), "the Gospels and Acts provide the main strategy and models."[21] He writes:

> In the 1990's, various people working among the unreached were led by God to focus on Luke 10 as a pattern for mission into new areas. Every CPM we know of uses this pattern of outsiders (foreigners or nationals) going out two by two. They go dependently seeking the person of peace who opens their home and *oikos* (family/group), they stay with this family as they share in truth and power, and they seek to bring the whole *oikos* to commitment to Jesus.[22]

McNeal says, "In North America, we are importing stories of what the Spirit is doing in other parts of the world."[23] Indeed, US missiologists and church leaders have sought to learn from and contextualize what God is doing in the church in the global south and east where simple and repeatable practices of disciple-making, mission, and church-planting—including the strategic focus on relational evangelism in *oikos*/household settings—have led to exponential growth. For example, in recent years, the journal *Mission Frontiers* devoted two entire issues to exploring, adapting, and applying those principles and practices to US churches and contexts.[24] In one article entitled, "It's Huge: Five Lessons the American Church is Learning from Church-

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[20] Smith and Kai, *T4T*, Loc. 1432-1436.

[21] Stan Parks, "A Church-Planting Movement is a Leadership Movement," *Mission Frontiers* 34-4 (July-August 2012): 25.

[22] Ibid. Parks notes that in addition to Luke 10, the same pattern is also found in Mark 6, Luke 9, Matthew 10, and in various adaptations in Acts.

[23] Reggie McNeal, "Missional Leadership," Doctor of Ministry class, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, August 25, 2012.

[24] *Mission Frontiers* 34-4, "Do We Need to Change the Way We Do Church to Reach the Unreached?" (July-August 2012), http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/archive/do-we-need-to-change-the-way-we-do-church-to-reach-the-unreached; and *Mission Frontiers* 34-5, "Simple Churches—Dramatic Transformations" (September-October 2012), http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/archive/simple-churches-issue (both accessed December 9, 2015).

Planting Movements," Carol Davis highlights the *oikos* pattern and principle and quotes one pastor in Texas saying of his church's mission strategy and efforts, "We had to get back to *oikos*: households; life on life."[25]

Denominational Considerations

At the time of writing, IPC is in the middle of a process of denominational realignment, seeking to be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and affiliate with ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. Articulating all the reasons behind this move are beyond the scope of this chapter but they generally fall into three broad categories related to theological, missional, and relational fit.[26] Since IPC is currently in between the two denominations, both the PC(USA) and ECO will be considered insofar as their constitutional and guiding documents relate to discipleship, mission, church, and missional communities.

Part I of the PC(USA)'s constitution is the *Book of Confessions*, a collection of eleven creeds, confessions, and catechisms.[27] These ancient, Reformed, and modern documents are intended both to "guide the church in its study and interpretation of Scripture" and to "strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers" (*Book of Order*, F-2.01). As such, they contain many points of

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[25] Carol Davis, "It's Huge: Five Lessons the American Church is Learning from Church-Planting Movements," *Mission Frontiers* 34-4 (July-August 2012): 19.

[26] For more on the dismissal process, see Irvine Presbyterian Church, "Discernment and Dismissal," irvinepres.org, http://irvinepres.org/discernment-dismissal/ (accessed December 10, 2015).

[27] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Confessions: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part I* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2004). It contains the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith.

practical application. For example, in terms of discipleship and mission, God's Word must be rightly preached so that disciples hear Jesus' voice and faithfully follow him (*Book of Confessions*, 5.134; 10.4). In turn, disciples are to go and preach the Gospel to others in obedience to Jesus' Great Commission (5.006; 6.058; 6.190) and serve as God's ministers and witnesses wherever their location and whatever their vocation (9.35, 37-38). While the Reformers identified the true church by "the true preaching of the Word of God . . . the right administration of the sacraments . . . [and] ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered" (3.18), the confessions also draw on the rich biblical imagery for God's people and the church is additionally understood to be the temple of the living God, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the flock under Christ's shepherding (5.130; 6.054; 6.186), the household and family of God (6.141; 9.47), and God's community of reconciliation sent into the world (9.31).

Part II of the PC(USA)'s constitution is the *Book of Order*.[28] It states that God's mission of salvation in Christ gives shape to the church's mission, which is partly defined as "calling all people to discipleship in Christ [in which they] glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God's mission" (F-1.01). As in the *Book of Confessions*, the church is identified as the body of Christ and further described as a community of faith, hope, love, and witness (F-1.0301). The church is also apostolic in that God has sent the church into the world as Christ's faithful evangelist to share the Gospel and lead people "to acceptance of Christ alone as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples" (F-1.0302d). Although discipleship is not

[28] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Order 2013/2015: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2013).

explicitly listed among "The Great Ends of the Church" (F-1.0304),[29] there are numerous references to discipleship and mission throughout. For example, elders in the church are to provide opportunities for regular worship, education, "and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship" (G-3.0201a). Baptism is understood to be a sign of God's saving grace and a call to discipleship (W-2.3006). Christian marriage is defined as "a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship" (W-4.9001).

Discipleship and mission are also largely explained and understood within the context of worship. In corporate worship, God's people gather around God's Word in Scripture, preaching, and the Sacraments, and then "are sent to follow the Word into the world" (W-1.1004; W-2.4007). Corporate worship is not only the time and place in which the church is fueled and sent out to participate in God's mission in the world and to which they return, but also the space in which visitors and non-/not-yet-Christians hear the Gospel proclaimed and are urged to respond to Christ in discipleship (W-2.5002; 2.6001; 3.3505; 3.5501; 7.1000-7.2000). Additionally, an entire chapter gives instructions on personal and family/household worship and how they relate to being Jesus' disciples and his witnesses in the world (W-5.0000; see especially 5.7000).

While the PC(USA) and its predecessor bodies were established and enjoyed their greatest growth denominationally in a Christendom context, ECO was formed more recently in 2012. ECO states as its mission: "to build flourishing churches that make

[29] These are: the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

disciples of Jesus Christ."[30] After the primary authority of the Scriptures, ECO also holds to the *Book of Confessions*, which it affirms as "theologically faithful, ecclesially appropriate, and organizationally suitable . . . faithful witnesses to the gospel and appropriate expressions of the Reformed perspective on Christian faith and life."[31] But because ECO believes strongly that theology drives mission, they also articulate and hold to a set of theological essentials that is Christ-centered, Reformed, and evangelical.[32] In addition, they lay out several core values that further speak to the kind of disciples, churches, and movement they seek to become. These are: a Jesus-shaped identity, biblical integrity, thoughtful theology, accountable community, egalitarian ministry, missional centrality, center-focused spirituality, leadership velocity, and kingdom vitality.[33]

In terms of its polity, ECO aims for an organizational structure that is decentralized, flatter, and leaner. They seek to foster a denominational culture of high trust and low control, giving greater authority and flexibility to local congregations and their leaders to be the church and to engage in mission in a changed, changing, and increasingly post-Christendom context.[34] Indeed, for ECO, to be the church and to be Jesus' disciples is thoroughly related to participating in God's mission. The opening

[30] ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, eco-pres.org (accessed December 28, 2015).

[31] ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, "Essential Tenets and Confessional Standards," eco-pres.org, http://eco-pres.org/static/media/uploads/resources/Essential%20Tenets/eco-essential-tenets-confessions.pdf (accessed December 28, 2015).

[32] Ibid.

[33] For a further description of each core value, see ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, "Who We Are," eco-pres.org, http://eco-pres.org/who-we-are/ (accessed December 28, 2015).

[34] ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, "An Introduction to ECO Polity," eco-pres.org, http://eco-pres.org/static/media/uploads/resources/introduction_to_eco_polity.pdf (accessed December 28, 2015).

sentences of ECO's polity state: "The Church is visible whenever two or more are gathered in Jesus' name. The congregation is composed of members of the body of Christ who have covenanted together to engage in the mission of God in their particular context, with Jesus as Head," and accordingly, amidst everything a congregation does, it should "all the while [be] preparing disciples to be the sent people of God in the world" (1.0101).[35] Persons who join a local congregation are not only members of the church but also "covenant partners" who encourage one another in discipleship and mission (1.0102) and become "fully involved in [the congregation's] mission to the local community and the world" (1.0301) as "missional Christians" (1.0305). In terms of church leadership, elders have the overarching responsibility and authority "for governing the congregation and guiding its mission for Christ in the world," including the discipleship of the congregation (1.0603; 1.0305). Based on similar ministry contexts and challenges, elders also meet with elders from a handful of other congregations for accountability and mutual encouragement (1.0104), while pastors meet with other pastors in pastoral covenant groups in order "to coach, encourage, and pray for one another as they strive for greater missional effectiveness" (2.0402). And in line with an overall emphasis on equipping and deploying the people of God for greater mission and ministry, ECO allows for properly trained elders and deacons to serve as lay pastors and administer the sacraments in churches and church plants (2.0501).

Importantly, while ECO affirms the marks of the church according to the Reformed tradition (1.0603), given that church is also wherever disciples gather in Jesus'

[35] ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, *ECO Polity and Discipline*, eco-pres.org, http://eco-pres.org/static/media/uploads/resources/eco_polity_and_discipline_020113.pdf (accessed December 28, 2015).

name, ECO also affirms and recognizes many expressions of the church that are smaller than the typical congregation: "These smaller units include, but are not limited to: small groups, missional communities, retreats, . . . satellite congregations, and house church gatherings" (2.0502).[36] In fact, as contained in their full name—A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians—ECO states as their evangelical commitment: "to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ and plant new missional communities."[37]

Summary

God the Trinity is the original missional community. He is the God who sends and the God who is sent: he sent his Son, he sent his Spirit, and he continues to send his people to join him on his redemptive mission in the world. Missional communities are one expression of the church, based on the New Testament *oikos*/household churches which were the primary organizing unit in the early church. More recent sociological insights into the social space that missional communities fill and facilitate, and missiological applications of the *oikos* principle that have resulted in fruitful evangelism, discipleship, and church planting lend further support for missional communities being an important structure and vehicle particularly for training groups of Christians to practice their discipleship and mission together. For IPC and their anticipated move to ECO, the adaptation and implementation of missional communities is one way to help them live out their disciple-making mission.

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[36] See also ECO, "An Introduction to ECO Polity": "Church is redefined. . . . Church can be lived out in small groups, accountability groups, ministry teams, house churches, and mission teams to name just a few."

[37] ECO, "Who We Are."

PART THREE

STRATEGY

CHAPTER 4

MINISTRY OUTCOMES

Based on the findings and conclusions in Chapter 3, a missional community can be described as an extended family[1] of around twenty to fifty people following Jesus on mission together. As a mid-sized group, it both allows for people to connect and build relationships with one another in genuine community, and fosters enough energy and momentum for the group to serve on mission as a team together. As Breen puts it, missional communities are "small enough to care, but big enough to dare."[2] Like the *oikos*/household churches of the New Testament, missional communities are centered on Jesus and seek to help people become and grow as his disciples by practicing a way of life together—a life of worship, fellowship, and mission. They do this in both organized and organic ways, with both structured gatherings and more spontaneous get-togethers. Depending on the context and the people involved, they can be either neighborhood-based or network-based: with the former, the community is a missionary as disciples live,

[1] The description of an extended family applies primarily to the overall size and feel of the mid-sized group. In terms of a person's relationship with God and with God's people, all Christians, regardless of age, are brothers and sisters in Christ, and sons and daughters of God.

[2] Mike Breen and the 3DM Team, *Leading Missional Communities: Rediscovering the Power of Living on Mission Together* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2013), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 163.

work, play, and serve in the same neighborhood; with the latter, disciples train, support, and encourage one another as missionaries in their respective relational networks or to a particular subculture or people group. Missional communities in general are intended to be flexible in their structure, lightweight and low-maintenance in terms of their schedule, and therefore easily reproducible.

A Pilot Missional Community

For IPC, one way to help them shift their understanding from church as a place to church as a people is to implement missional communities in which they practice and live out their discipleship and mission together. However, given IPC's age, history, and established ministry and congregational culture, rather than initiating a church-wide program with missional communities as a new organizing structure, a single, pilot missional community will first be launched. This approach allows room for experimentation and gives permission to learn from trial and error. It also introduces something new into the established church culture without it being perceived and rejected as a direct threat. As Neil Cole and Phil Helfer say, it is "a more viral approach that brings change one cell at a time."[3] The hope is that, God-willing, as the pilot missional community grows and new missional communities are birthed, interest and momentum slowly build throughout the larger congregation, and it is further envisioned that IPC might one day live out their disciple-making mission not only gathered on a church campus but also scattered as a network of missional communities across Irvine and surrounding cities.

[3] Neil Cole and Phil Helfer, *Church Transfusion: Changing Your Church Organically—from the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 823.

Goals for the Pilot Missional Community

There are several strategic goals for the pilot missional community on a number of different levels. First, the overarching goal is for participants in the pilot community to understand, embrace, and intentionally live out their identity and calling as Jesus' missionary disciples. To that end, a second goal is to teach, train, and equip participants with tools that they can use both in their own discipleship and in discipling others. Third, as participants practice their discipleship and mission together, it is hoped that they will build relationships with each other and become an extended family, loving and supporting one another through the various ups and downs of life. Fourth, as the pilot missional community gains momentum and others in IPC begin to hear about it through their relationships with participants, word of mouth, and the occasional reference in a worship service or class, it will be a model for the larger congregation of an alternative expression of the church, one in which discipleship and mission are prioritized and practiced in community. And fifth, it is hoped that the pilot community will eventually produce new leaders who will go on to start and lead a second missional community.

Content for the Pilot Missional Community

In order to achieve these goals, several discipling tools will be introduced that collectively give focus, shape, and direction to the pilot missional community. These tools are biblically-based and may also be described as lenses through which disciples view their lives on mission or rhythms that they regularly practice. Because the tools are intended to equip participants to be everyday missionaries and disciple-making disciples, they are intentionally simple (so easily understood and learned), sustainable (so

consistently exercised and practiced), and transferable (so they can be repeated and reproduced in the lives of others). As Cole points out:

> Simple is transferable, while complex breaks down. . . . When we approach disciple-making, wanting to pass the baton on to succeeding generations, we must refine the process so that it is simple and transferable. Simplicity is the key to the fulfillment of the Great Commission . . . . If the process is complex, it will break down early in the transference to the next generation of disciples. The more complex the process, the greater the giftedness needed to keep it going. The simpler the process, the more available it is to the broader Christian populace.[4]

With this in mind, the following five discipling tools will form the bulk of the content for the pilot missional community.

The DNA of a Disciple: Up/In/Out

Foundational to what the pilot missional community does is the identification and practice of what may be called "the DNA of a disciple." While an important aspect of discipleship is having the right information about Jesus and the Gospel, an equally important but often neglected aspect of discipleship is imitating Jesus and living as he lived. Willard explains that imitation was characteristic of the rabbi-disciple relationship in Jesus' day: disciples entered into "a lengthy period of close association with their rabbi—hearing, observing, imitating . . . and becoming like him in thought, character, and abilities."[5] Jesus retained this expectation in his relationship with his disciples, and as such, Willard argues, it "remains normative to this day."[6]

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[4] Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups* (CMA Resources, 1999), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 942, 952-955.

[5] Dallas Willard, "Discipleship," dwillard.org, http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=134#5a (accessed January 6, 2016).

[6] Ibid.

A key starting point for disciples to imitate and become like Jesus is in the area of relationships. The Gospels show Jesus consistently living his life along three primary relationships. First, he practices and maintains an intimacy with God the Father (see, for example, Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16; Jn 5:19). Second, he invests in his disciples; he shares life with them, calls them "friends," and is particularly close to three of them (Mk 3:14-15; 14:33; Lk 9:28-36; Jn 15:15). Third, through both his words and actions, Jesus serves and ministers to the crowds, the needy, and those considered far from God (Mt 4:23-25; 9:35-36). Virtually every pericope in the Gospels shows Jesus in one of these three relationships; one text in which they all appear is Luke 6:12-19.

The same three relationships can be seen in the life and practices of the early church. Acts 2:42-47 provides a clear and basic summary of the church living in communion with Christ, in community with one another, and in commission to the world. As Frost and Hirsch explain:

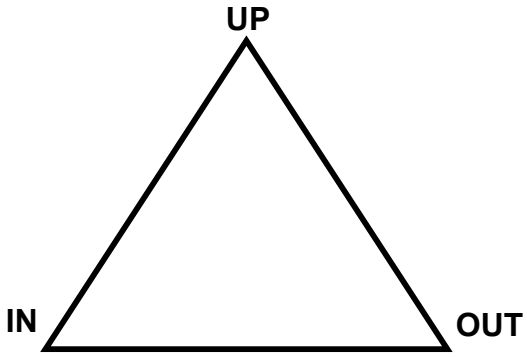
> The first churches were concerned with balancing equal commitments to fostering their relationships with God, one another, and the world. Like an equilateral triangle, where all three sides must be the same size, the early church recognized the equal importance of all three broad commitments. In this respect, the essence of church is relationship and these three types of relationships interact so much that it is impossible to differentiate one from another.[7]

Participants in the pilot missional community will be taught and encouraged to imitate Jesus and follow the example of the early church by prioritizing and investing in these three relational commitments. To borrow and adapt Breen and Cockram's

[7] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 77.

terminology, it is living Up to God, In to other disciples, and Out to bless the world.[8] Visually, it can be depicted as follows:

Figure 1. The DNA of a Disciple: UP/IN/OUT



Additionally, Up/In/Out provides focus and a monthly rhythm for the missional community when they gather together. For example, one week they will focus Up—connecting with God through spiritual disciplines such as praise and thanksgiving, prayer, and reading the Bible. A second week they will focus In—connecting with one another by sharing their praises and concerns and praying for each other. A third week they will focus Out—seeking to bless the world by a combination of doing the good works of the Gospel through various service projects and sharing the good words of the Gospel in relational mission and evangelism. A fourth (and the occasional fifth) week gives the missional community some flexibility depending on the season and the context: they may focus on one of the relationships for a second time that month, they may practice a combination such as celebrating Thanksgiving or Christmas together (Up and In) and inviting their non-/not-yet-Christian friends to join them (Out), they may do

[8] Breen and Cockram, *Building a Discipling Culture*, Loc. 979-982.

something fun such as playing in a park or going for a hike, or they may decide simply to take a break and rest.

It is intended that the pilot missional community will practice and train in this monthly rhythm together over an extended period of time. As participants imitate Jesus in this way, they start to become—in the words of Frost and Hirsch—"a little Jesus."[9] The eventual goal is that Up/In/Out becomes a defining and integral part of who they are as disciples both individually and collectively, and something they reproduce and pass along to others. In this way, Up/In/Out can be called "the DNA of a disciple."

Hearing and Obeying God: Four Questions Anyone Can Ask

One of the crucial skills disciples must develop is hearing and obeying God. In the Gospels, the crowds are often "amazed" as they hear Jesus preach and teach (see, for example, Mt 13:54; Mk 1:22; 6:2; Lk 4:22, 32), but without further commitment or response, at best they remain ambivalent to him. In contrast, Jesus identifies genuine disciples as those who hear his words and put them into practice (Mt 7:24-27, compare especially with 7:28), and further teaches that obeying his commands and teaching others to do the same is a major part of what it means to follow him (Mt 28:20). As Willard explains, "A disciple is a learner, a student, an apprentice—a practitioner, even if only a beginner."[10] Failure to teach obedience, then, constitutes a failure of discipleship and

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[9] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2009), 6.

[10] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), xi.

disciple-making. Bill Hull puts it this way: "[W]e have not really made disciples if we have not taught them to obey."[11]

While God can speak to people in many different ways, Scripture is the authoritative, inspired, and living word of God (2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12). To help participants in the pilot missional community hear and obey God as they read the Bible, four simple questions will be used. Based on the Discovery Bible Study method used by overseas missionaries and which has seen fruitful response in several contexts,[12] this tool directs learners to engage the Bible passage being studied, helps them discover biblical truths or principles for themselves, and prompts them to respond in obedience.

After praying and asking God to help them hear and obey him, participants read a portion of the Bible together. They then ask and answer the following questions: First, what does this tell us about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? Second, what does this tell us about people and ourselves? Third, what does this tell us we ought to do? (A clarifying question can also be asked: Is there a command to obey or an example to follow?) Fourth, who can I share this with?

As participants respond to the questions, they are asked to point out where in the passage they find their answers. Reading and engaging the Bible together in this way has several advantages: it trains disciples to connect directly with God's word and develops in them a high view of the authority of Scripture; it builds their confidence in hearing God speak to them; and in light of the fact that much of the Bible was originally written

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[11] Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 20th anniv. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 288.

[12] See, for example, Jerry Trousdale, "Simple Churches, Dramatic Transformations, Rapid Replication," *Mission Frontiers* 34-5 (September-October 2012): 7-13. See also Parks, "A Church-Planting Movement is a Leadership Movement," 26.

to communities and groups of people,[13] it corrects a sometimes unhealthy individualistic approach to Scripture typical of modern Westerners as disciples learn together and teach one another (Col 3:16). After working through the questions, disciples then pray for and encourage one another to do what they sense God has been saying to them; accountability is exercised as they follow up with each other in the next few days or at the next missional community gathering.

This, of course, is not the only way to read the Bible. But it will be a staple practice in many of the Up gatherings as it is a simple tool that invites and facilitates broad participation. Anyone can use the four questions to approach almost any Bible passage, everyone can answer and respond by engaging the text, and everyone is asked and encouraged to respond to God's word in obedience. More specifically, in seeking to be Jesus-shaped and Jesus-centered, the pilot missional community will use this tool to study portions of the Gospels as well as the book of Colossians, which Willard considers "perhaps the best overall statement on the spiritual formation of the disciple in the New Testament," and describes as "a curriculum for Christlikeness."[14]

Becoming a Family: Food and One-Anothering

Running directly counter to the rugged individualism so highly valued in American culture is the priority of Christian community and doing life together with other disciples. As Eddie Gibbs points out, "Commitment to community, with mutual accountability, constitutes a great challenge to churchgoers who have bought into an

[13] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Faith of Leap: Embracing a Theology of Risk, Adventure and Courage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), Kindle Electronic Version: Loc. 766-767.

[14] Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 350, 351.

individualistic, consumer culture mentality."[15] Likewise, Frost and Hirsch write, "Our very identity as God's people is bound up in the collective identity of being an *ecclesia*—a group of people called, named, redeemed, ruled, and loved by Jesus. . . . We are never going to be the church that Jesus built if we do not take community seriously."[16]

The New Testament often describes church as "the family of God" (see, for example, Gal 6:10; 1 Thes 4:10; Heb 2:11; 1 Pet 2:17) and believers as "brothers and sisters in Christ" (Rom 8:29; 15:30; 1 Cor 1:10; Phil 4:1, 21; Col 1:2; 1 Thes 1:4). It is with this understanding and in this context that the many "one another" commands are to be practiced: disciples are to love and be devoted to one another (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12; Rom 13:8; 1 Thes 4:9; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:8; 1 Jn 3:11; 4:7, 11); they are to honor and live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:10, 16; 1 Pet 3:8); they are to accept one another and live in peace with each other (Rom 14:13; 15:7; 1 Thes 5:13); they are to serve one another and carry each other's burdens (Gal 5:13; 6:2); they are to be patient and bear with one another, and extend kindness, compassion, and forgiveness to one another (Eph 4:2, 32; Col 3:13; 1 Thes 5:15); they are to instruct, teach, and admonish one another (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16; 1 Thes 4:18); they are to encourage and spur one another on, and to keep meeting together (Heb 3:13; 10:24-25); they are to confess their sins to one another and pray for each other (Jas 5:16); they are to offer hospitality and enjoy fellowship with one another (1 Pet 4:9; 1 Jn 1:7).

Clearly, it is impossible to obey these commands as an individual believer isolated from the Christian family. Eugene Peterson states it well: "We can no more be a

[15] Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchMorph: How Megatrends are Reshaping Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2009), 50.

[16] Frost and Hirsch, *The Faith of Leap*, Loc. 769-772.

Christian and have nothing to do with the church than we can be a person and not be in a family. . . . God never makes private, secret salvation deals with people. His relationships with us are personal, true; intimate, yes; but private, no. We are a family in Christ. When we become Christians, we are among brothers and sisters in faith. No Christian is an only child."[17] Indeed, Christian fellowship and community is a great gift God gives his people, whereby God uses disciples to minister tangibly his love, grace, encouragement, and strength to one another. As Bonhoeffer wrote:

> The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. . . . The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure.[18]

While participants in the pilot missional community will naturally connect with each other at every gathering, the In week will be a more intentional time for them to share their lives with one another, pray for each other, and generally practice the various one-another commands. They will do this over a shared meal together, just as Jesus often ate with his disciples (see, for example, Mt 9:10; Lk 22:15; Jn 21:12-13) and the early church regularly ate together as part of their fellowship (Ac 2:42, 46). As Hirsch and Ford point out, "Sharing meals together on a regular basis is one of the most sacred practices we can engage in as believers. Food is the product of our work, an extension of

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[17] Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 175.

[18] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperCollins, 1954), 19, 23.

our very lives. Breaking bread around the table of fellowship is both a symbolic and practical witness of the unity of the body of Christ."[19]

Importantly, missional community life is not limited to the organized weekly gathering. Becoming a family requires building relationships in more organic and spontaneous ways as well, and participants will therefore be encouraged to connect with each other more informally as opportunities arise in the regular flow and rhythm of their everyday lives. For example, some of them may meet for a mid-week lunch or over coffee, some may invite a few others over for a weeknight meal at short notice, and still others may offer to run errands or babysit younger children. This is life together and life-on-life discipleship; as Sally Breen calls it, this is "discipleship on the hoof."[20]

Relational Mission: Persons of Peace

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, discipleship and mission are inextricably linked. Jesus regularly sends his disciples out on mission as an essential part of their training and apprenticeship. He sends the twelve (Mt 10:1-14ff.; Mk 6:6b-13, 30; Lk 9:1-6, 10) and the seventy-two (Lk 10:1-17), and tells them to do essentially everything he has been doing in his ministry—preaching, teaching, and healing. He also gives them a key strategy for relational mission: they are to look particularly for the Person of Peace (Lk 10:5-6; Mt 10:11-13).

According to Jesus, such persons will have several identifying characteristics. First, they are welcoming and warm towards disciples; if they are not, Jesus tells disciples

[19] Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford, *Right Here, Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 211.

[20] Sally Breen, "Leading Kingdom Movements," 3DM pre-conference workshop, Verge 2013 Disciple-Making Conference, Austin, TX, February 28, 2013.

simply to move on (Lk 10:5-6, 8, 10-11; Mt 10:14). Second, they serve and support disciples in some way; for Jesus' original disciples, the Person of Peace is the one who offers them food and shelter (Lk 10:7-8; Mt 10:11). Third, they listen to disciples, particularly when it comes to matters related to the Gospel, and implicitly they listen to God and Jesus who sent the disciples (Lk 10:16; Mt 10:40). Fourth, they are relational gatekeepers who open doors to new relationships that disciples otherwise would not have access to (Lk 10:5, where the greeting of peace "to this house" [*oikos*] is intended for the household or family). In essence, a Person of Peace is someone God has been preparing and is spiritually open to the Gospel—the good news of life with God in his kingdom through a trust relationship with Jesus the king. Although they are not yet followers of Jesus, they extend relational favor to disciples and connect well with them. As Alex Absalom says simply, "They like you and you like them."[21] Once disciples find a Person of Peace, Jesus instructs them to stay with them and intentionally invest in that relationship (Lk 10:7-8).

Several New Testament examples help flesh this out. Simon Peter is a Person of Peace to Jesus: he welcomes Jesus into his home; he serves Jesus by letting him use his boat as a pulpit; he listens to and obeys Jesus; he then becomes Jesus' disciple (Lk 4:38-39; 5:1-11). There is the Samaritan woman at the well: she serves Jesus when he asks for a drink; she engages in a spiritual conversation with him; she listens to him and the text implies she puts her faith in him; she then goes back to tell her own people, introduces them to Jesus, and many more Samaritans become believers (Jn 4:7-42). In Acts,

[21] Alex Absalom, *The Viral Gospel: How Finding Your Person of Peace Accelerates Your Mission* (Exponential Resources, 2014), 20.

Cornelius the centurion is a Person of Peace: he is a spiritually open God-fearer; he welcomes Peter into his home and gathers his relatives and friends; Peter shares about Jesus and the Gospel; they all listen and become baptized believers (10:1-48). Lydia the businesswoman is another example: she is a worshiper of God; she listens to Paul and responds to the Gospel; she and all her household are baptized; she then welcomes Paul and his missionary team into her home and serves them (Ac 16:14-15). Then there is the Philippian jailer: Paul and Silas are imprisoned for preaching the gospel; an earthquake sets all the prisoners free; the jailer in his shaken state listens to what Paul has to say; he takes Paul and Silas home and serves them by caring for their wounds and feeding them; he and his household then become baptized believers (Ac 16:25-34).

Like putting on a set of lenses, the Person of Peace principle helps disciples prayerfully identify and discern who Jesus is sending them to reach with the Gospel. In the pilot missional community, participants will learn about Persons of Peace and be asked to identify them in their own lives; if they cannot come up with any or if they are unsure, they will be encouraged to pray and ask God to help them establish these connections. Then on a regular basis, likely during some of the Out gatherings, participants will share and pray together for their Persons of Peace, and be encouraged to invest intentionally in those relationships; for this reason, Persons of Peace will usually be people who have regular contact with disciples, often where disciples live, work, and play. And depending on the level of relationship participants have with their Persons of Peace, they may invite them to a missional community gathering when appropriate.

Blessed to be a Blessing: BLESS

From the time God first appeared to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), God has blessed his people and intended them to be a blessing to others as an expression of his heart for the nations and for the world. Jesus and the good news of salvation and life in God's kingdom is the ultimate fulfillment of God's blessing (see, for example, Mk 1:14-15; Mt 4:13-17; 5:1-10). Disciples, through faith in Jesus, are the recipients of God's blessings and the spiritual descendants of Abraham (Eph 1:3ff.; Rom 4:11, 16; Gal 3:6-9), and as such, they too are called and sent out to participate in God's redemptive mission by being a blessing to the world. As McNeal puts it, "Missional Jesus followers believe that the way they demonstrate love and service will intrigue people to pursue getting to know the God who inspires such service. . . . [T]hey maintain that an authentic expression of faith requires Jesus followers to adopt an intentional life of blessing people. This, they believe, demonstrates the heart of God for people."[22]

Using the acronym BLESS, participants in the pilot missional community will be taught and equipped with some simple and practical steps to bless their Persons of Peace and other non-/not-yet-Christian friends with God's love and the Gospel.[23] As presented here, there is a clear starting point and general progression. In reality, however, all the steps of BLESS continually inform and overlap with each other.

First, Begin with prayer. Participants will be encouraged to pray regularly for their Persons of Peace, that God will soften their hearts and they will be open to hearing

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[22] McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, Loc. 1056-1059.

[23] This tool is based on Dave Ferguson, "Five Ways to Bless Your Neighbor," vergenetwork.org, http://www.vergenetwork.org/2012/12/27/five-ways-to-bless-your-neighbors-dave-ferguson/ (accessed September 30, 2013).

about Jesus and the Gospel. As a secondary tool, Cole's helpful summary of biblically-based prayers for people who do not yet know God will be used (see Appendix A).[24]

Second, Listen. Just as Jesus often asked questions to engage people in conversation (see, for example, Jn 3:10; 4:7; 5:6), participants will be encouraged to adopt a listening and learning posture in building relationships with Persons of Peace and other spiritually open friends. Through asking questions, listening, and showing a genuine interest in their lives, participants demonstrate God's love and concern for them.

Third, Eat. Jesus used the imagery of eating and feasting as a metaphor for life in God's kingdom (see, for example, Lk 14:15-24), and often shared table fellowship with people who were far from God (Lk 5:27-30; 7:34). As Hirsch and Ford point out, "Missional hospitality is a tremendous opportunity to extend the kingdom of God. We can literally eat our way into the kingdom of God."[25] Putting into practice Jesus' teaching (Lk 10:7), participants will be encouraged to eat and share table fellowship regularly with their Persons of Peace.

Fourth, Serve. As participants spend time doing the first three steps and get to know their Persons of Peace, they will discover ways to bless them by serving them or meeting a particular need. Following Jesus' example of being a servant (Mk 10:45; Mt 23:11; Phil 2:7), participants will be urged to serve their Persons of Peace as a tangible expression of God's love for them.

Fifth, Story. As participants build relationships with their Persons of Peace, there will be natural opportunities for the telling of personal stories. Persons of Peace will

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[24] Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, Loc. 1534-1559.

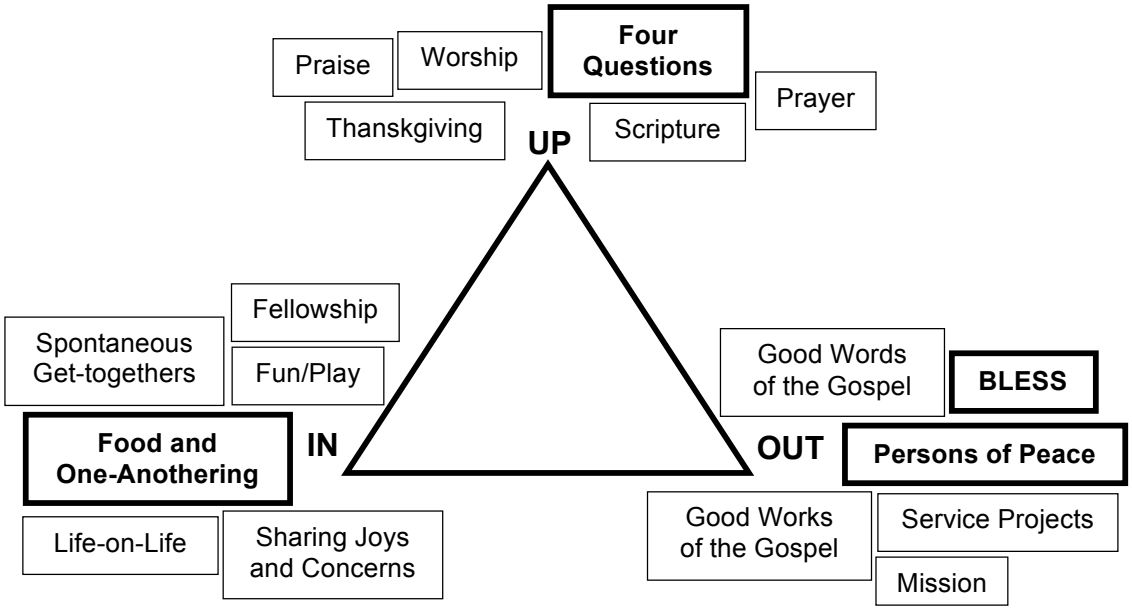
[25] Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 203.

share their stories, and participants will share theirs; as Jesus' disciples, their stories will also involve telling the ultimate story of God's love and rescue in which Jesus is the ultimate hero. Opportunities for participants to share and discuss Jesus and the Gospel with their Persons of Peace may arise and follow.

How It All Fits Together

Up/In/Out—the DNA of a disciple and that which provides focus and a monthly rhythm for the pilot missional community—was depicted earlier as an equilateral triangle. The other discipling tools just presented which form the bulk of the content for the pilot community, along with a few other tools and practices that will be used from time to time, can now be added to show how they work together to help train and equip participants to be everyday missionaries and disciple-making disciples:

Figure 2. Fitting the Discipling Tools Together



While the pilot missional community will, in a typical month, practice the relationships of Up, In, and Out somewhat separately, in reality the three relationships intertwine, overlap, and inform each other closely and regularly. Up necessarily takes priority for without a relationship with God, there would be no disciples, no Christian community, and no mission. Up informs In as disciples love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and worship God together as his family. At the same time, Up informs Out as disciples follow Jesus and join God on his redemptive mission in the world, calling and inviting others also to enter God's kingdom and be part of God's family through faith in Jesus. In and Out mutually inform one another for it is often in the context of sharing mission and facing challenges and risks together that disciples further strengthen and deepen their love for one another. As Hirsch makes note of an observation by a veteran church leader with over sixty years of ministry experience, "no groups that came together around a non-missional purpose (e.g. prayer, worship, study, etc.) ever ended up becoming missional. It was only those groups that set out to be missional (while embracing prayer, worship, study, etc., in the process) that actually got to doing it."[26]

Two further components complete the description of life in the pilot missional community. First, in aiming to be an intergenerational, extended family, children will be encouraged to participate in all the gatherings and activities to the degree that they are able; as the saying goes, many things are caught rather than taught, and this is true both of parenting and discipleship. Second, from the start, participants will be informed of the hope and goal for the pilot missional community to reproduce; subsequently, this will be revisited at least once a year in order to keep it before the group.

[26] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 235.

Leadership and Target Population of the Pilot Missional Community

Catalytic leadership for the pilot missional community will be provided by IPC's leader of disciple-making and equipping. Through personal relationships he and his family have with different congregants, initial participants (and their families, if applicable) will be prayerfully identified. They will learn about the vision and goals of the pilot missonal community, and be invited to pray and consider being part of it. It is hoped that these initial participants will be around ten to fifteen people, or around four or five couples or families. Crucially, they will have to have both a clear understanding of and a clear commitment to the goals and direction of the pilot missional community, for it will be their life together that provides a model for others.

After an initial period of time in which the first participants learn about and start practicing Up/In/Out and the other discipling tools, other congregants from IPC may be invited to visit and learn about the pilot missional community; some may eventually join as God leads. Participants may also invite their Persons of Peace and other spiritually open friends to visit and participate in the life of the pilot missional community as appropriate. God-willing, as the pilot community grows both in numbers and in terms of discipleship and spiritual maturity, potential leaders will be identified and asked to pray and consider starting and/or leading a second missional community that will invite still others from the larger IPC congregation to follow Jesus as an extended family practicing their discipleship and mission together.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The implementation and evaluation of the pilot missional community is expected to take place over a period of time measured not in weeks or months but in years. This extended timeframe is necessary given the vision, goals, and content of the pilot missional community. For it is highly difficult, if not virtually impossible, for the DNA of Up/In/Out and the related practices and tools to become a deep and integral part of disciples if they do not train in them regularly over an extended period of time. And it is highly unlikely that disciples will share life together and grow to love one another as family without frequent, ongoing, and significant relational contact.

More fundamentally, the commitments of time and relationships are part of the very nature of discipleship. Nowhere in the Bible does it mention anyone who finished or completed their discipleship. Rather, disciples follow Jesus on a lifelong journey and never cease being disciples. And Jesus himself spent a disproportionately large amount of the three years of his public ministry discipling the Twelve, an investment of time and relational connection that translates today to a much longer timeframe than the typical

discipleship class or church program that lasts a few weeks at a time. As Icenogle compares and contrasts:

> If the typical American small group meets for approximately two hours per week for a life span of two years, they've had about 160 hours of life together. When we compare this to Jesus' time with the Twelve—all day, every day, for three years—even allowing some time apart—the Twelve may have had as many as nine thousand hours of life together. This simple observation could explain why modern discipleship falls far short of the life transformational possibilities Christ can bring to a group together on the way. The Twelve were a family on the move, a mission group.[1]

Add to all this the realities of living in suburban Southern California—where individualism, consumerism, and busyness have a deep hold on many people's lives—and it is both clear and crucial that enough time must be given for the pilot missional community to be established and to gain traction and momentum. Simply put, there are no shortcuts to growing, developing, and training missionary disciples. As McNeal says, "our work is never done. We can check off our fall program calendar week by week as events occur, but people just don't ever seem to get 'done.'"[2]

A Timeline for the Pilot Missional Community

At the time of writing, the pilot missional community has already been underway for almost two years. Theological research for the project was done as part of the author's doctoral studies beginning in January 2011 and completed in October 2013, shortly after he started serving as IPC's leader of disciple-making and equipping. In his first few months, he started getting to know the congregation by visiting some of the various groups in the church and meeting with different individuals. During this time, he asked

[1] Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 194.

[2] McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, Loc. 1532-1533.

God for clarity and direction as to who he should invite to be participants in the pilot missional community.

In late-January 2014, following a sense of God's leading, the author met separately with three individuals and shared with them the vision and goals of the pilot missional community. He then invited them to talk and pray with their wives and families and to consider whether God was leading them to be part of it. All three families committed to being part of the pilot community, and in early-March they met together with the author and his family in their home. In that first gathering, the vision, goals, and a brief overview of some of the content for the pilot missional community were shared, as well as a general projection of the timeline. After agreeing on a regular meeting time of Friday evenings, the pilot missional community—a network-based group of four families, numbering thirteen people in all—began meeting weekly. Shortly after, an individual from Canada who had recently moved to Irvine for work and had started attending IPC also accepted an invitation to join the group. Together they started learning the rhythm of Up/In/Out, as well as a few of the discipling tools. They did this from mid-March until mid-June, a period of about twelve weeks. During this time, the author invited two more individuals and their families to consider being part of the pilot missional community; both declined for various reasons.

Summer 2014 saw a break in the regular gatherings of the pilot missional community; with the various summer, travel, and vacation schedules, participants instead gathered more informally and spontaneously in smaller groups. In late-August, the group resumed meeting on a weekly basis. In early-September, they revisited the vision and goals of the pilot missional community. The author and his wife, as well as a few others

in the group, had continued to share with other congregants about the pilot missional community; that fall, two couples and three families visited and all subsequently committed to being part of the group. Around the same time, the individual from Canada finished his work in Irvine and moved back to Toronto.

Between September 2014 and June 2015, the pilot missional community regularly practiced the monthly rhythm of Up/In/Out and the related discipling tools. There was some flexibility, however, as they took advantage of the natural opportunities to live Out on mission during the Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons. Around March 2015, one family stopped participating due to other commitments, but the group continued to welcome visitors and another young family joined the group around May. During the summer months of 2015, they practiced a modified schedule of gathering twice a month which included more opportunities for fun and play.

In September 2015, the group once again reviewed their vision and goals, and resumed their weekly gatherings and living out the DNA of Up/In/Out. In the weeks leading up to this, the author had been praying and asking God to raise up new leaders from within the pilot community who would take over its leadership. In late-September, he approached two couples separately and asked them to pray and consider whether God might be calling them to this leadership role; in late-October, having prayed about it, both couples declined but reaffirmed their ongoing commitment and participation as part of the pilot community.

As of March 2016, the pilot missional community continues to gather weekly and practices living Up/In/Out. They have also built into their monthly rhythm a regular Friday night off when they rest or otherwise get together with their Persons of Peace or

others outside the pilot missional community. In the time since the pilot community launched, in the course of sharing life together, they have walked with and supported one another through transitions such as job changes and work relocation, parenting challenges, babies being born, buying a home, caring for elderly parents, and adopting a child. Aside from the more structured weekly gatherings, a number of them have also gotten together more informally in smaller groups. The pilot missional community continues to welcome both occasional and regular visitors to their gatherings and activities; at other times, they join with other congregants to serve on church-wide service projects and mission trips. Not everyone in the pilot community is able to attend every weekly gathering, although many do; when everyone shows up, there are around nine families, about thirty-five people in all, ranging in age from infants of less than a year old up to those who are in their mid- to late-fifties.

It should be noted that while the launch and implementation of the missional community is as a pilot and not as a church-wide program, it has not been isolated from nor independent of the larger church and its leadership. From the start, the author in his role as IPC's leader of disciple-making and equipping and the lead pastor have worked closely together to help IPC live out their disciple-making mission. Together they introduced the DNA of Up/In/Out—which now features prominently on the church web site[3]—to the entire congregation as they led the church through a sermon series on the book of Acts in the first half of 2014. Further exposure to the language of Up/In/Out and some of the related practices have come in a variety of forms and contexts: in a couple

[3] Irvine Presbyterian Church, "Who We Are," http://irvinepres.org/our-mission/ (accessed January 13, 2016).

discipleship training workshops led by the author and attended by staff and congregants from across the life of the church; in church newsletter articles written both by the author and by the lead pastor; as part of IPC's new member process; in staff, elders, and deacons meetings; and in a number of leadership conversations related to church organization and finances. An explanation and overview of the pilot missional community as a vehicle for helping IPC live out their mission was presented to the elders in 2015, and updates continue to be given. The author and the lead pastor also meet each week for a working lunch, during which time they discuss various matters in the life of the church including the pilot missional community. In fact, the lead pastor and his family on a semi-regular basis visit the pilot community and participate in some of the group's activities, and he and his wife are prayerfully considering starting and leading a new missional community. Other visitors to the pilot missional community have included both former and current elders and deacons, as are some of the participants themselves.

Leadership Identification and Training for New Missional Communities

For the pilot missional community, particularly in its germinal and formative stages, the author will serve as the primary leader, teacher, vision caster, and coach. As the pilot community learns and grows, and as the DNA of Up/In/Out and the related discipling practices begin to take root within the group, the author will gradually delegate leadership and responsibility to various participants. At the time of writing, this has already been taking place in a variety of ways: some have used their musical abilities to lead the group in times of praise and worship; others have led the group to engage in short-term missions and service projects, or organized some of the fun/play activities for

the group; one or two others have led the group in studying Scripture; and many have led by opening up their homes to host missional community gatherings.

Although the pilot missional community has a relatively flat structure—as an extended family, participants contribute where and what they can to their life together—critical to the group's growth and flourishing in training missionary disciples, as well as the hoped-for reproduction of a second missional community, is the raising up and deployment of new leaders. As Icenogle points out, "The concept of "leaderless" groups is not valid."[4] Indeed, for missional communities, as with the *oikos*/household churches of the New Testament, leaders are needed who will take responsibility for the spiritual welfare and development of those in the group as they follow Jesus on mission together.

In line with biblical models and requirements for leadership (see, for example, Ac 4:13; 6:3; 11:22-26; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Ti 1:6-9; Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:1-3), new leaders from the pilot missional community will be prayerfully identified on the basis of their character and relationship with Jesus, their giftedness and ability to serve and lead others in a mid-sized group, their availability of time and energy to exercise such leadership, as well as their own sense of God's call to the leadership role as they pray, and related discernment conversations between the author and the lead pastor. Originally, the author had hoped that within approximately two years, around early- to mid-2016, new leaders in the pilot missional community would be identified, trained, and equipped; these new leaders would either lead the pilot community, thus allowing the author to start a second missional community, or start and lead a second missional community themselves. However, after the two couples who had been approached in late-2015 both declined

[4] Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Groups*, 90.

taking on more leadership, it appears that more time is needed for the author to give away more leadership, responsibility, and ownership of the group to participants, while continuing to pray and wait for God to raise up new leaders in his time.

One way the author will intentionally train and equip potential new leaders is by working with them through the stages of disciple-making and leadership development as Jesus did with his disciples. These stages can be summarized as: I do, you watch; I do, you help; you do, I help; you do, I watch.[5] When God's leading and timing becomes clear for the launch of a second missional community, and new leaders have been identified, trained, and are ready to be deployed, it is intended that they will receive ongoing coaching, training, support, and encouragement through participation in a monthly leadership small group led by the author.

Resources for the Pilot Missional Community

As noted in Chapter 4, missional communities are generally flexible in structure, lightweight, and low-maintenance. Accordingly, the resources needed are relatively simple and few. The biggest resource needed is meeting space and the pilot missional community will typically gather in participants' homes. While not everyone has a home large enough to accommodate twenty to forty adults and children, five or six families have regularly hosted the weekly gatherings with folding tables and chairs being used as needed. Visitors and other congregants have sometimes joined the group for a service project, and on some of those occasions, they have met on the church campus for the

[5] Numerous authors and church leaders have summarized, adapted, and put into their own words these stages and principles of disciple-making and leadership development. For one example, see Breen and Cockram, *Building a Discipling Culture*, Loc. 1543-1749.

extra space. And depending on the context and time of year, as appropriate, the pilot missional community has also gathered in parks, coffee shops, and restaurants.

Two further resources needed are food and supplemental learning content. In terms of food, for the In gatherings, everyone contributes to the potluck meal as they are able; for the other gatherings, different participants volunteer to provide drinks, snacks, or other light refreshments. In terms of the learning content, at times it may be helpful to supplement the discipling practices and tools with articles, blogs, videos, and various other materials—many of which are accessible online—from other authors and church leaders. These may include contributions from those associated with the missional church/discipleship movement such as Breen, Frost, and Hirsch, as well as from those who have thought and written extensively on the topics of discipleship, spiritual formation, and community such as Willard, Bonhoeffer, and Richard Foster.

Assessment Plan

An initial assessment and analysis of the pilot missional community is planned for mid-2016. This will be a little more than two years since the group began, and about a year since the newest members of the group started participating, which should be enough time for the pilot missional community to establish a sense of momentum as participants practice discipleship and mission, share life together, grow to love one another, and become an extended family, as well as for the discipling practices and tools to begin to take root within them. An assessment and feedback form (see Appendix B) created by the author will be distributed to all adult and teenage participants to fill out at one of the weekly gatherings or by email to those not in attendance that week.

The assessment and feedback form has 8 short-answer questions. Questions 1-3 ask the length of time participants have been part of the pilot missional community, and the frequency with which they have gathered with others in the group, both in the structured weekly gatherings and in more informal and spontaneous ways. Question 4 asks participants how being part of the missional community has contributed to their growth and understanding of what it means to be Jesus' disciple and to make disciples. Question 5 asks participants to share more specifically which of the discipling practices and tools have been most helpful to their growth as disciples, and which have been most difficult for them to practice. Question 6 asks parents how participating in the missional community has helped them disciple their children, and ways their children have benefited from being part of the group. Question 7 then invites participants to ask any questions related to discipleship and mission that they would like to explore further with the missional community. Question 8 invites participants to share any additional, closing comments they might have.

It should be noted that any group assessment related to matters of discipleship and spiritual growth has some shortcomings as individual disciples are often at different stages of spiritual maturity, in different seasons of their spiritual journeys, face different situations and circumstances in their lives, and grow spiritually at different rates. As Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich outline in their book, *The Critical Journey*, people often move back and forth between six broad stages of faith development.[6] They identify that in the first three stages, a person comes to a recognition of God, pursues a life of

[6] Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 2005), 7.

discipleship, and is outwardly productive and faithful in serving God. In stage four, however, a person may go through an inward journey during which they struggle and wrestle with God; they may stop serving or participating as actively as they once did, although eventually they may come to a deeper trust and rest in God. This can then lead to stage five where they discover a fresh sense of God's calling and purpose for their lives, and accordingly, in stage six, they learn to live a life that reflects God's love to others.[7] Taking this paradigm into consideration, the focus in the pilot missional community on training in discipleship and mission together would appear to correlate strongly to the first three stages. It may be that, as God works in their lives, some participants may also experience stage four at some point; in those instances, it would be more pastorally sensitive and helpful for those participants to follow up with them more directly and personally.

Nonetheless, it is anticipated that the feedback and responses from all the participants will provide valuable insight into the overall health and effectiveness of the pilot missional community in attaining its original goals, particularly the first three of the five goals described in Chapter 4. These related to: helping participants understand and intentionally live out their identity and calling as Jesus' missionary disciples; training and equipping participants with tools for everyday discipleship and disciple-making; and providing a context in which participants build relationships with one another and become an extended family following Jesus on mission together. The fourth goal—that of the pilot missional community being a model for the larger congregation—should be

[7] See Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, Chapters 3-9 for a more detailed description of each stage of faith development.

attained as a natural and eventual outgrowth of the group's overall vitality and effectiveness. And the fifth goal—that of launching a second missional community around late-2016 or early-2017—will be considered and re-evaluated in light of participants' responses as well as the availability and readiness of new leaders.

The author will compile the responses, and then share his analysis of the feedback with participants at a future gathering. He expects that this will be a group discussion in which participants provide further feedback and discuss any changes or next steps they might take in their life together. Beyond that, the author anticipates at some point sharing the results and findings from the pilot missional community with the lead pastor and elders, and praying and discussing as leadership how missional communities might further be implemented as one way to help IPC live out their disciple-making mission.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This doctoral project has focused on equipping the people of IPC to be everyday missionaries and disciple-making disciples. Over the course of the project, a number of key principles related to discipleship, disciple-making, mission, and community have been identified and emphasized. While the principles summarized here speak directly to IPC's mission and context, they have broader implications for the larger Church as well.

First, discipleship is Jesus-shaped and Jesus-centered. Disciples are those who love, trust, follow, and obey Jesus as Lord of all, and who teach and help others do the same. In this, disciples spend time being with Jesus, learning from Jesus, in order to become like Jesus in his character and in the way he lived his life. For a highly-educated, Reformed congregation such as IPC, the reminder here is not just knowing certain truths or beliefs about Jesus—as crucial as that is—but knowing Jesus in a personal, intimate relationship and modeling their lives after his. As Bonhoeffer put it simply and succinctly: "Jesus is the only content [of discipleship]. There is no other content besides Jesus. He himself is it. So the call to discipleship is a commitment solely to the person of Jesus Christ."[1]

Second, in faithfulness to Jesus' Great Commission, discipleship and disciple-making must be the Church's overarching priority. While in many ways throughout IPC's history, discipleship and following Jesus has always been part of their ministry, in more recent years, discipleship and the related mandate to disciple-making—helping others also follow Jesus—has been clarified and come to the fore, as expressed in IPC's mission

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 59.

statement, "to make disciples who make disciples." This in turn has given the congregation an overall focus and direction, and provided a lens through which the various ministries of the church can both be shaped and evaluated. Indeed, as one longtime member and elder, David Cheng, recently remarked, in his opinion, the mission and direction of the church have never been more clear and compelling than in the present season.[2]

Third, discipleship and mission are inextricably linked. Jesus' disciples are those who follow and join him on his mission in the world, and the Church is the Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered community of Jesus' disciples, the sent people of God. For IPC, this means recapturing their identity and calling as missionary disciples, and engaging their home mission context and the people where they live, work, and play with the same missional mindset, posture, and impulse they have had in their long-standing commitment to global missions—with more of a "go to them" approach rather than just a "come to us" approach. Indeed, this is an approach the North American church as a whole will increasingly need to take as the US becomes less and less Christian.[3]

Fourth, discipleship and mission are to be practiced in the context of life-on-life relationships and community. For IPC in their suburban Southern California context, individualism and busyness constitute two of perhaps the three greatest obstacles and challenges to discipleship and disciple-making (consumerism being the third). But given

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[2] David Cheng, IPC elder appreciation dinner, Irvine, CA, January 24, 2016.

[3] The so-called "rise of the nones"—those who claim no religious affiliation—in the US has been well-documented in recent years. See, for example, Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Christians Drop, 'Nones' Soar in New Religion Portrait," USAToday.com, May 12, 2015, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/05/12/christians-drop-nones-soar-in-new-religion-portrait/27159533/ (accessed May 12, 2015).

that the very nature of discipleship and disciple-making is relational investment—relationship with Jesus, and relationship with others towards Jesus—disciples must be willing to re-prioritize and realign their schedules in order to live out the biblical call to gather regularly, follow Jesus on mission together, and share life with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ in the family of God.

Fifth, discipleship and disciple-making take time. Discipleship is a lifelong journey and requires the mindset that one will follow Jesus for the long haul. There is no shortcut to this. For IPC as they pursue their disciple-making mission, it means taking the time necessary to plant a discipling DNA as the seed of a discipling culture, encouraging disciples to practice and train in discipleship and mission together by going slower and deeper with fewer for longer, and exercising patience and perseverance while they pray and work towards the reproduction of disciples, leaders, and new missional communities. To paraphrase Greg Ogden, it requires having a large enough vision for the future to start small in the present, and building slowly and solidly along the way.[4]

In seeking to apply these principles and as one way of helping IPC live out their disciple-making mission, this project proposed the adaptation and implementation of a pilot missional community based on the *oikos*/household churches of the New Testament. Launched in March 2014, the pilot missional community has provided a context and structure in which an intergenerational, mid-sized group of participants have been practicing a monthly rhythm and training with some biblically-based discipling tools. While an assessment of the pilot missional community with input from participants is

[4] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 128.

planned for later this year, from the author's perspective of leading the group and practicing discipleship and mission with them over the past two years or so, it appears that the initial goals of the pilot missional community are on their way to being realized, albeit a little more slowly than initially hoped for and projected.

For now it remains to be seen how and when God might raise up new leaders and the pilot missional community multiply into a second missional community. It also remains to be seen how missional communities might further be implemented more broadly across the life of IPC—perhaps as a network of both neighborhood- and network-based missional communities across Irvine and the surrounding cities—and the openness and willingness of congregants to live out their discipleship and mission in these vehicles with one another. Indeed, as noted already, any such implementation will need to be done slowly and carefully, in a way that is more organic and relational. It will also need to give room for new participants to adapt and structure their missional communities in ways that help them apply and practice the principles related to discipleship and mission in their respective contexts. Nevertheless, given the findings and conclusions of this doctoral project, the potential of missional communities as one way of helping IPC live out their mission, "to make disciples who make disciples," is both encouraging and promising.

APPENDIX A

PRAYING FOR NON-/NOT-YET-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS[1]

The prayers (listed below) offered are specific, progressive, and extensive. They are also in accordance with biblical principles of prayer and the salvation of lost souls.

1. I pray, Lord, that you draw _____ to yourself (John 6:44).
2. I pray that _____ seeks to know you (Acts 17:27).
3. I pray that _____ hears and believes the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).
4. I ask you to prevent Satan from blinding _____ to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).
5. Holy Spirit, I ask you to convict _____ of his/her sin and reveal his/her need for Christ's redemption (John 16:8).
6. I ask you to send someone who will share the Gospel with _____ (Matt. 9:37-38).
7. I also ask that you give me (and/or my fellow disciple) the opportunity, the courage, and the right words to share the truth with _____ (Col. 4:3-6; Eph. 6:19-20).
8. Lord, I pray that _____ turns from his/her sin (Acts 17:30-31; 1 Thess. 1:9-10).
9. Lord, I pray that _____ would put all of his/her trust in Christ (John 1:12; 5:24).
10. Lord, I pray that _____ will confess Christ as Lord of his/her life, take root and grow in his/her faith, and bear much fruit for your glory (Rom. 10:9-10; Col. 2:6-7; Luke 8:15).

It is a group effort in bringing these souls before the throne of grace. When we see a new soul born into the Kingdom we all rejoice, having played a significant role in the process.

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[1] Based on Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups* (CMA Resources, 1999), ch. 8.

APPENDIX B

ASSESSMENT / FEEDBACK FORM: PILOT MISSIONAL COMMUNITY (MC)

Thank you for taking the time to fill this out. Your responses and feedback will be compiled and reported back to you at a future MC gathering. They may also be shared with other IPC leaders and congregants as appropriate and as they pertain to our church's mission.

Name (for identification purposes only; will not be shared): _____

1. When did you start participating in the life of the MC? _____

2. On average, how often do you participate in the weekly Friday gatherings?

Once a month *Twice a month* *Three or more times a month*

3. Have there been times in which you have connected with others in the MC in more informal and spontaneous ways? If so, please give some examples.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. IPC's mission is "to make disciples who make disciples." How has participating in the MC helped you grow in your understanding and practice of what it means to be Jesus' disciple and to make disciples? How has it challenged you? Please give examples if possible. _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Which of the discipling practices, rhythms, and tools (e.g., UP/IN/OUT, studying Scripture using four questions, eating together, “one-anothering,” Persons of Peace, BLESS, etc.) have you found most helpful to your growth as a disciple? In what way? Which have you found most difficult to practice? Why?

6. If applicable, how has participating in the MC helped you in discipling your children? How have you seen them benefit from being part of the MC? Please give examples if possible.

7. What further questions related to discipleship and mission do you have that you would like to explore further with the MC?

8. Any additional comments:

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